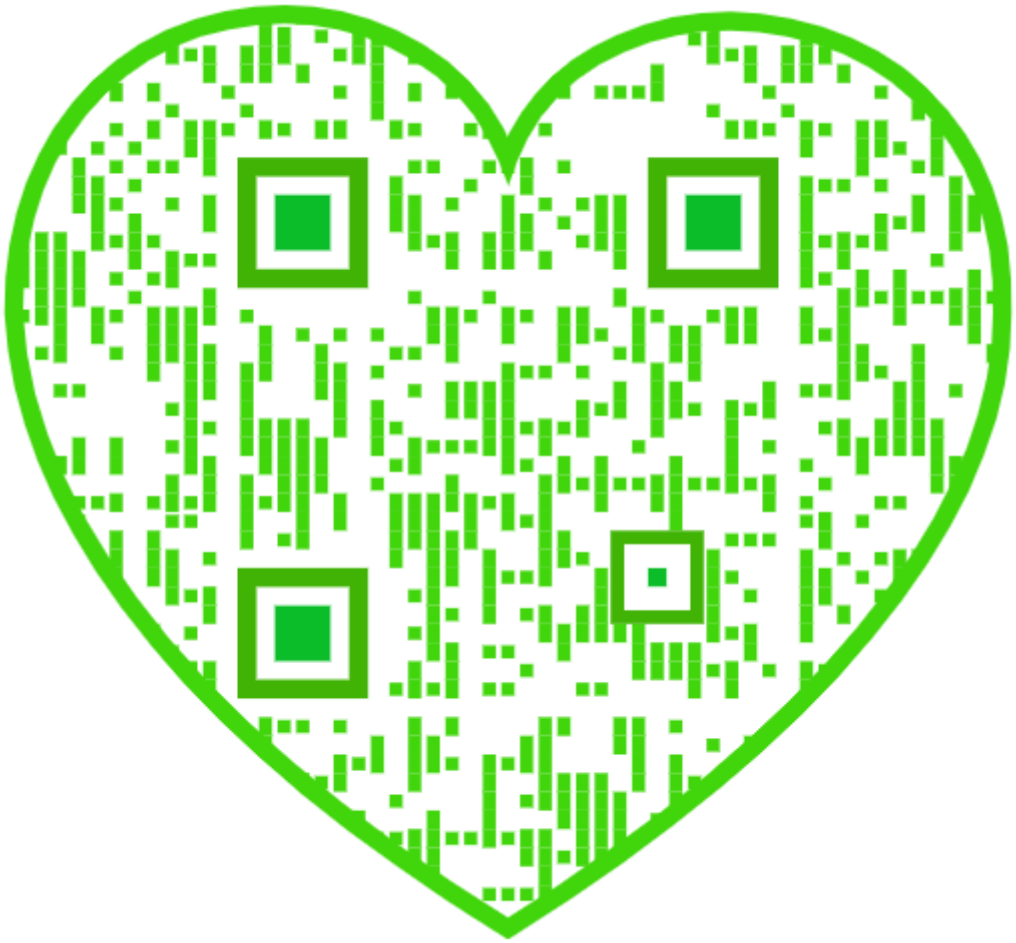

THE HOLY FAMILY

(Repose in Egypt—by Ludwig Knaus)

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

FROM "BEN-HUR"

by

LEW. WALLACE

ILLUSTRATED FROM DRAWINGS BY
WILLIAM MARTIN JOHNSON
AND FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

MWR

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PREFACE

I HEARD the story of the Wise Men when a small boy. My mother read it to me; and of all the tales of the Bible and the New Testament none took such a lasting hold upon my imagination, none so filled me with wonder. Who were they? Whence did they come? Were they all from the same country? Did they come singly or together? Above all, what led them to Jerusalem, asking of all they met the strange question, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

Finally I concluded to write of them. By carrying the story on to the birth of Christ in the cave by Bethlehem, it was possible, I thought, to compose a *brochure* that might be acceptable to the Harper Brothers. Seeing the opportunities it afforded for rich illustration, they might be pleased to publish it as a serial in their Magazine.

When the writing was done, I laid it away in a drawer of my desk, waiting for courage to send it forward; and there it might be still lying had it not been for a fortuitous circumstance.

There was a great mass Convention of Republicans at Indianapolis in '76. I resolved to attend it, and took a sleeper from Crawfordsville the evening before the meeting. Moving slowly down the aisle of the car, talking with some friends, I passed the state-room. There was a knock on the door from the inside, and some one called my name. Upon answer, the door opened, and I saw Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll looking comfortable as might be considering the sultry weather.

"Was it you called me, Colonel?"

"Yes," he said. "Come in. I feel like talking."

I leaned against the cheek of the door, and said: "Well, if you will let me dictate the subject, I will come in."

"Certainly. That's exactly what I want."

I took seat by him, and began:

"Is there a God?"

Quick as a flash, he replied: "I don't know; do you?"

And then I: "Is there a Devil?"

And he: "I don't know; do you?"
"Is there a Heaven?"
"I don't know; do you?"
"Is there a Hell?"
"I don't know; do you?"
"Is there a Hereafter?"
"I don't know; do you?"

I finished, saying, "There, Colonel, you have the texts. Now go."

And he did. He was in prime mood; and, beginning, his ideas turned to speech, flowing like a heated river. His manner of putting things was marvellous; and as the Wedding Guest was held by the glittering eye of the Ancient Mariner, I sat spellbound, listening to a medley of argument, eloquence, wit, satire, audacity, irreverence, poetry, brilliant antitheses, and pungent excoriation of believers in God, Christ, and Heaven, the like of which I had never heard. He surpassed himself, and that is saying a great deal.

The speech was brought to an end by our arrival at the Indianapolis Central Station nearly two hours after its commencement. Upon alighting from the car, we separated: he to go to a hotel, and I to my brother's, a long way up northeast of town. The street cars were at my service, but I preferred to

walk, for I was in a confusion of mind not unlike dazement.

To explain this, it is necessary now to confess that my attitude with respect to religion had been one of absolute indifference. I had heard it argued times innumerable, always without interest. So, too, I had read the sermons of great preachers—Bossuet, Chalmers, Robert Hall, and Henry Ward Beecher—but always for the surpassing charm of their rhetoric. But—how strange! To lift me out of my indifference, one would think only strong affirmations of things regarded holiest would do. Yet here was I now moved as never before, and by what? The most outright denials of all human knowledge of God, Christ, Heaven, and the Hereafter which figures so in the hope and faith of the believing everywhere. Was the Colonel right? What had I on which to answer yes or no? He had made me ashamed of my ignorance; and then—here is the unexpected of the affair—as I walked on in the cool darkness I was aroused for the first time in my life to the importance of religion. To write all my reflections would require many pages. I pass them to say simply that I resolved to study the subject. And while casting round how to set about the

study to the best advantage, I thought of the manuscript in my desk. Its closing scene was the child Christ in the cave by Bethlehem: why not go on with the story down to the crucifixion? That would make a book, and compel me to study everything of pertinency; after which, possibly, I would be possessed of opinions of real value.

It only remains to say that I did as resolved, with results — first, the book *Ben-Hur*, and, second, a conviction amounting to absolute belief in God and the divinity of Christ.

LEWIS WALLACE.

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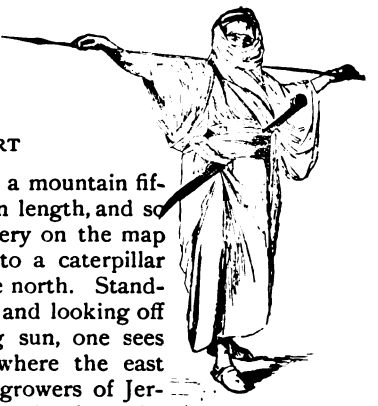
The flashes come and go;
All heaven bursts her starry floors,
And strews her lights below,
And deepens on and up! . . ."
—TENNYSON.

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS



CHAPTER I

INTO THE DESERT

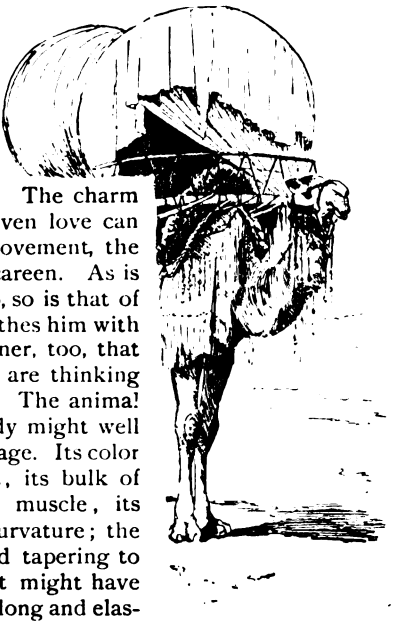
THE Jebel es Zubleh is a mountain fifty miles and more in length, and so narrow that its tracery on the map gives it a likeness to a caterpillar crawling from the south to the north. Standing on its red-and-white cliffs, and looking off under the path of the rising sun, one sees only the Desert of Arabia, where the east winds, so hateful to the vine-growers of Jericho, have kept their playgrounds since the beginning. Its feet are well covered by sands tossed from the Euphrates, there to lie; for the mountain is a wall to the pasture-lands of Moab and Ammon on the west—lands which else had been of the desert a part.

The Arab has impressed his language upon everything south and east of Judea; so, in his tongue, the old Jebel is the parent of numberless wadies which, intersecting the Roman road—now a dim suggestion of what once it

was, a dusty path for Syrian pilgrims to and from Mecca—run their furrows, deepening as they go, to pass the torrents of the rainy season into the Jordan, or their last receptacle, the Dead Sea. Out of one of these wadies—or, more particularly, out of that one which rises at the extreme end of the Jebel, and, extending east of north, becomes at length the bed of the Jabbok River—a traveller passed, going to the table-lands of the desert. To this person the attention of the reader is first besought.

Judged by his appearance, he was quite forty-five years old. His beard, once of the deepest black, flowing broadly over his breast, was streaked with white. His face was brown as a parched coffee-berry, and so hidden by a red kufiyeh (as the kerchief of the head is at this day called by the children of the desert) as to be but in part visible. Now and then he raised his eyes, and they were large and dark. He was clad in the flowing garments so universal in the East; but their style may not be described more particularly, for he sat under a miniature tent, and rode a great white dromedary.

It may be doubted if the people of the West ever overcome the impression made upon them by the first view of a camel equipped and loaded for the desert. Custom, so fatal to other novelties, affects this feeling but little. At the end of long journeys with caravans, after years of residence with the Bedawin, the Western-born, wherever they may be, will stop and wait

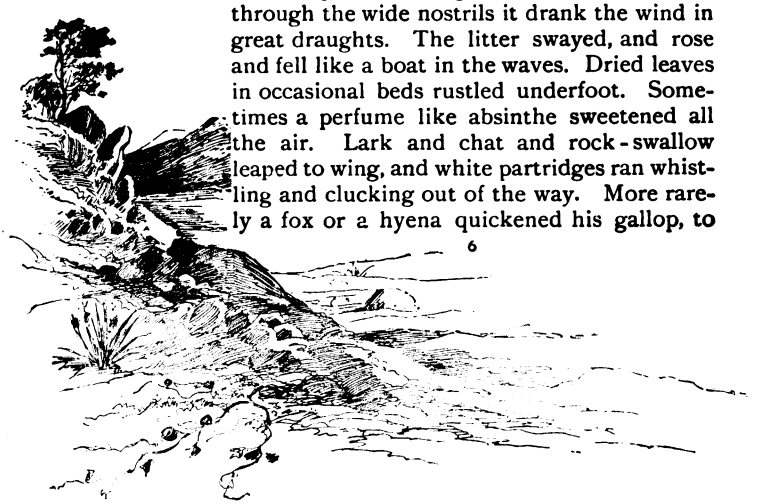


the passing of the stately brute. The charm is not in the figure, which not even love can make beautiful; nor in the movement, the noiseless stepping, or the broad careen. As is the kindness of the sea to a ship, so is that of the desert to its creature. It clothes him with all its mysteries; in such manner, too, that while we are looking at him we are thinking of them: therein is the wonder. The animal which now came out of the wady might well have claimed the customary homage. Its color and height; its breadth of foot, its bulk of body, not fat, but overlaid with muscle, its long, slender neck, of swan-like curvature; the head, wide between the eyes, and tapering to a muzzle which a lady's bracelet might have almost clasped, its motion, step long and elastic, tread sure and soundless—all certified its Syrian blood, old as the days of Cyrus, and absolutely priceless. There was the usual bridle, covering the forehead with scarlet fringe, and garnishing the throat with pendent brazen chains, each ending with a tinkling silver bell; but to the bridle there was neither rein for the rider nor strap for a driver. The furniture perched on the back was an invention which with any other people than of the East would have made the inventor renowned. It consisted of two wooden boxes, scarce four feet in length, balanced so that one hung at each side; the inner space, softly lined and carpeted, was arranged to allow the master to sit or lie half reclined; over it all was stretched a green awning. Broad back and breast straps, and

girths, secured with countless knots and ties, held the device in place. In such manner the ingenious sons of Cush had contrived to make comfortable the sunburned ways of the wilderness, along which lay their duty as often as their pleasure.

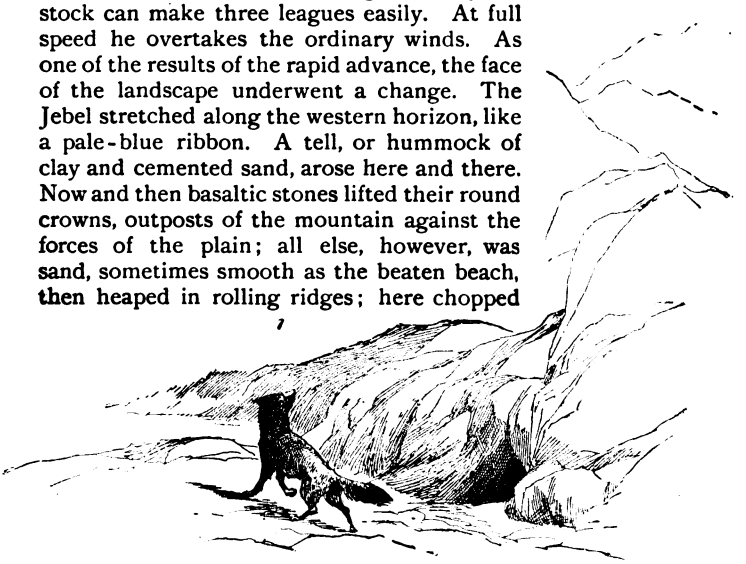
When the dromedary lifted itself out of the last break of the wady, the traveller had passed the boundary of El Belkâ, the ancient Ammon. It was morning-time. Before him was the sun, half curtained in fleecy mist; before him also spread the desert; not the realm of drifting sands, which was farther on, but the region where the herbage began to dwarf; where the surface is strewn with bowlders of granite, and gray and brown stones, interspersed with languishing acacias and tufts of camel-grass. The oak, bramble, and arbutus lay behind, as if they had come to a line, looked over into the well-less waste, and crouched with fear.

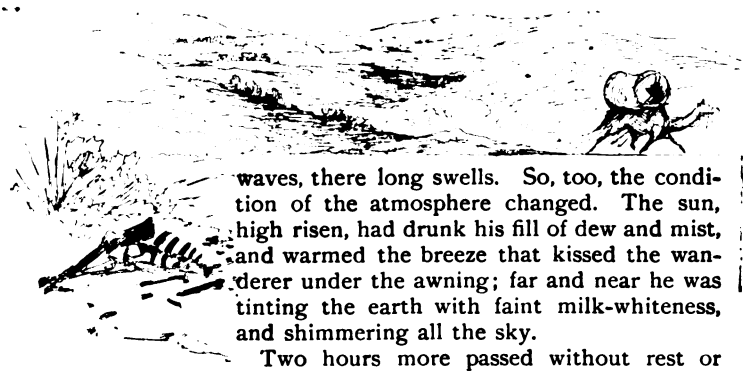
And now there was an end of path or road. More than ever the camel seemed insensibly driven, it lengthened and quickened its pace, its head pointed straight towards the horizon; through the wide nostrils it drank the wind in great draughts. The litter swayed, and rose and fell like a boat in the waves. Dried leaves in occasional beds rustled underfoot. Sometimes a perfume like absinthe sweetened all the air. Lark and chat and rock-swallow leaped to wing, and white partridges ran whistling and clucking out of the way. More rarely a fox or a hyena quickened his gallop, to



study the intruders at a safe distance. Off to the right rose the hills of the Jebel, the pearl-gray veil resting upon them changing momentarily into a purple which the sun would make matchless a little later. Over their highest peaks a vulture sailed on broad wings into widening circles. But of all these things the tenant under the green tent saw nothing, or, at least, made no sign of recognition. His eyes were fixed and dreamy. The going of the man, like that of the animal, was as one being led.

For two hours the dromedary swung forward, keeping the trot steadily and the line due east. In that time the traveller never changed his position, nor looked to the right or left. On the desert, distance is not measured by miles or leagues, but by the saat, or hour, and the manzil, or halt: three and a half leagues fill the former, fifteen or twenty-five the latter; but they are the rates for the common camel. A carrier of the genuine Syrian stock can make three leagues easily. At full speed he overtakes the ordinary winds. As one of the results of the rapid advance, the face of the landscape underwent a change. The Jebel stretched along the western horizon, like a pale-blue ribbon. A tell, or hummock of clay and cemented sand, arose here and there. Now and then basaltic stones lifted their round crowns, outposts of the mountain against the forces of the plain; all else, however, was sand, sometimes smooth as the beaten beach, then heaped in rolling ridges; here chopped





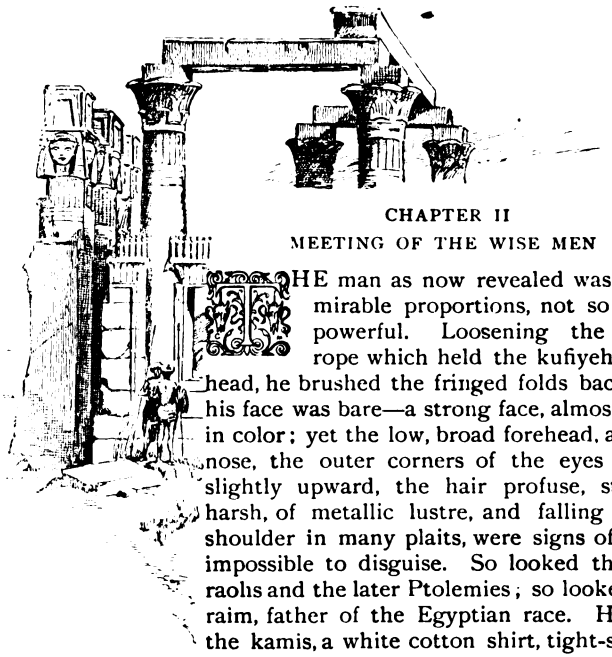
waves, there long swells. So, too, the condition of the atmosphere changed. The sun, high risen, had drunk his fill of dew and mist, and warmed the breeze that kissed the wanderer under the awning; far and near he was tinting the earth with faint milk-whiteness, and shimmering all the sky.

Two hours more passed without rest or deviation from the course. Vegetation entirely ceased. The sand, so crusted on the surface that it broke into rattling flakes at every step, held undisputed sway. The Jebel was out of view, and there was no landmark visible. The shadow that before followed had now shifted to the north, and was keeping even race with the objects which cast it; and as there was no sign of halting, the conduct of the traveller became each moment more strange.

No one, be it remembered, seeks the desert for a pleasure-ground. Life and business traverse it by paths along which the bones of things dead are strewn as so many blazons. Such are the roads from well to well, from pasture to pasture. The heart of the most veteran sheik beats quicker when he finds himself alone in the pathless tracts. So the man with whom we are dealing could not have been in search of pleasure; neither was his manner that of a fugitive; not once did he look behind him. In such situations fear and curiosity are the most common sensations; he was not moved by them. When men are lonely, they stoop to any companion-

ship; the dog becomes a comrade, the horse a friend, and it is no shame to shower them with caresses and speeches of love. The camel received no such token, not a touch, not a word.

Exactly at noon the dromedary, of its own will, stopped, and uttered the cry or moan, peculiarly piteous, by which its kind always protest against an overload, and sometimes crave attention and rest. The master thereupon bestirred himself, waking, as it were, from sleep. He threw the curtains of the houdah up, looked at the sun, surveyed the country on every side long and carefully, as if to identify an appointed place. Satisfied with the inspection, he drew a deep breath and nodded, much as to say, "At last, at last!" A moment after, he crossed his hands upon his breast, bowed his head, and prayed silently. The pious duty done, he prepared to dismount. From his throat proceeded the sound heard doubtless by the favorite camels of Job—Ikh! ikh!—the signal to kneel. Slowly the animal obeyed, grunting the while. The rider then put his foot upon the slender neck, and stepped upon the sand.



CHAPTER II

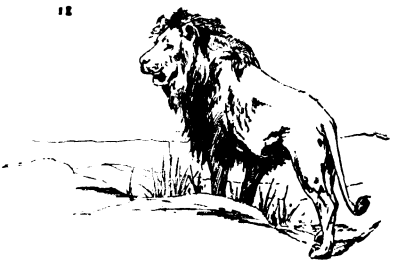
MEETING OF THE WISE MEN

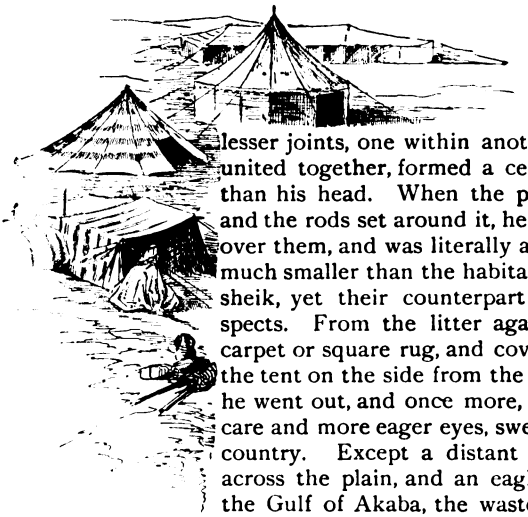
THE man as now revealed was of admirable proportions, not so tall as powerful. Loosening the silken rope which held the kufiyeh on his head, he brushed the fringed folds back until his face was bare—a strong face, almost negro in color; yet the low, broad forehead, aquiline nose, the outer corners of the eyes turned slightly upward, the hair profuse, straight, harsh, of metallic lustre, and falling to the shoulder in many plaits, were signs of origin impossible to disguise. So looked the Pharaohs and the later Ptolemies; so looked Mizraim, father of the Egyptian race. He wore the kamis, a white cotton shirt, tight-sleeved, open in front, extending to the ankles and embroidered down the collar and breast, over which was thrown a brown woollen cloak, now, as in all probability it was then, called the aba, an outer garment with long skirt and short sleeves, lined inside with stuff of mixed cotton and silk, edged all round with a margin of clouded yellow. His feet were protected by sandals, attached by thongs of soft leather. A sash held the kamis to his waist. What was very noticeable, considering he was alone, and that the desert was the haunt of leopards and lions, and men quite as wild, he carried

no arms, not even the crooked stick used for guiding camels; wherefore we may at least infer his errand peaceful, and that he was either uncommonly bold or under extraordinary protection.

The traveller's limbs were numb, for the ride had been long and wearisome; so he rubbed his hands and stamped his feet, and walked round the faithful servant, whose lustrous eyes were closing in calm content with the cud he had already found. Often, while making the circuit, he paused, and, shading his eyes with his hands, examined the desert to the extremest verge of vision; and always, when the survey was ended, his face clouded with disappointment, slight, but enough to advise a shrewd spectator that he was there expecting company, if not by appointment; at the same time, the spectator would have been conscious of a sharpening of the curiosity to learn what the business could be that required transaction in a place so far from civilized abode.

However disappointed, there could be little doubt of the stranger's confidence in the coming of the expected company. In token thereof, he went first to the litter, and, from the cot or box opposite the one he had occupied in coming, produced a sponge and a small gurglet of water, with which he washed the eyes, face, and nostrils of the camel; that done, from the same depository he drew a circular cloth, red-and-white-striped, a bundle of rods, and a stout cane. The latter, after some manipulation, proved to be a cunning device of





lesser joints, one within another, which, when united together, formed a centre pole higher than his head. When the pole was planted, and the rods set around it, he spread the cloth over them, and was literally at home—a home much smaller than the habitations of emir and sheik, yet their counterpart in all other respects. From the litter again he brought a carpet or square rug, and covered the floor of the tent on the side from the sun. That done, he went out, and once more, and with greater care and more eager eyes, swept the encircling country. Except a distant jackal, galloping across the plain, and an eagle flying towards the Gulf of Akaba, the waste below, like the blue above it, was lifeless.

He turned to the camel, saying low, and in a tongue strange to the desert, "We are far from home, O racer with the swiftest winds—we are far from home, but God is with us. Let us be patient."

Then he took some beans from a pocket in the saddle, and put them in a bag made to hang below the animal's nose; and when he saw the relish with which the good servant took to the food, he turned and again scanned the world of sand, dim with the glow of the vertical sun.

"They will come," he said, calmly. "He that led me is leading them. I will make ready."

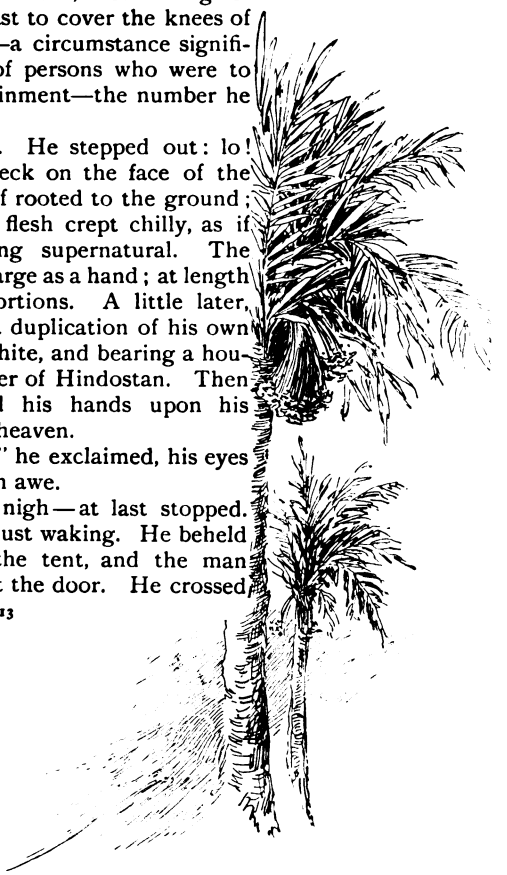
From the pouches which lined the interior of the cot, and from a willow basket which was part of its furniture, he brought forth ma-

terials for a meal: platters close-woven of the fibres of palms; wine in small gurglets of skin; mutton dried and smoked; stoneless shami, or Syrian pomegranates; dates of El Shelebei, wondrous rich and grown in the nakhil, or palm orchards, of Central Arabia; cheese, like David's "slices of milk;" and leavened bread from the city bakery — all which he carried and set upon the carpet under the tent. As the final preparation, about the provisions he laid three pieces of silk cloth, used among refined people of the East to cover the knees of guests while at table—a circumstance significant of the number of persons who were to partake of his entertainment—the number he was awaiting.

All was now ready. He stepped out: lo! in the east a dark speck on the face of the desert. He stood as if rooted to the ground; his eyes dilated; his flesh crept chilly, as if touched by something supernatural. The speck grew; became large as a hand; at length assumed divine proportions. A little later, full into view swung a duplication of his own dromedary, tall and white, and bearing a houdah, the travelling litter of Hindostan. Then the Egyptian crossed his hands upon his breast, and looked to heaven.

"God only is great!" he exclaimed, his eyes full of tears, his soul in awe.

The stranger drew nigh — at last stopped. Then he, too, seemed just waking. He beheld the kneeling camel, the tent, and the man standing prayerfully at the door. He crossed



his hands, bent his head, and prayed silently; after which, in a little while, he stepped from his camel's neck to the sand, and advanced towards the Egyptian, as did the Egyptian towards him. A moment they looked at each other; then they embraced—that is. each threw his right arm over the other's shoulder, and the left round the side, placing his chin first upon the left, then upon the right breast.

"Peace be with thee, O servant of the true God!" the stranger said.

"And to thee, O brother of the true faith! —to thee peace and welcome," the Egyptian replied, with fervor.

The new-comer was tall and gaunt, with lean face, sunken eyes, white hair and beard, and a complexion between the hue of cinnamon and bronze. He, too, was unarmed. His costume was Hindostani; over the skull-cap a shawl was wound in great folds, forming a turban; his body garments were in the style of the Egyptian's, except that the aba was shorter, exposing wide flowing breeches gathered at the ankles. In place of sandals, his feet were clad in half-slippers of red leather, pointed at the toes. Save the slippers, the costume from head to foot was of white linen. The air of the man was high, stately, severe. Visvamitra, the greatest of the ascetic heroes of the Iliad of the East, had in him a perfect representative. He might have been called a Life drenched with the wisdom of Brahma — Devotion Incarnate. Only in his eyes was there proof of humanity; when he lifted his face from the

Egyptian's breast, they were glistening with tears.

"God only is great!" he exclaimed, when the embrace was finished.

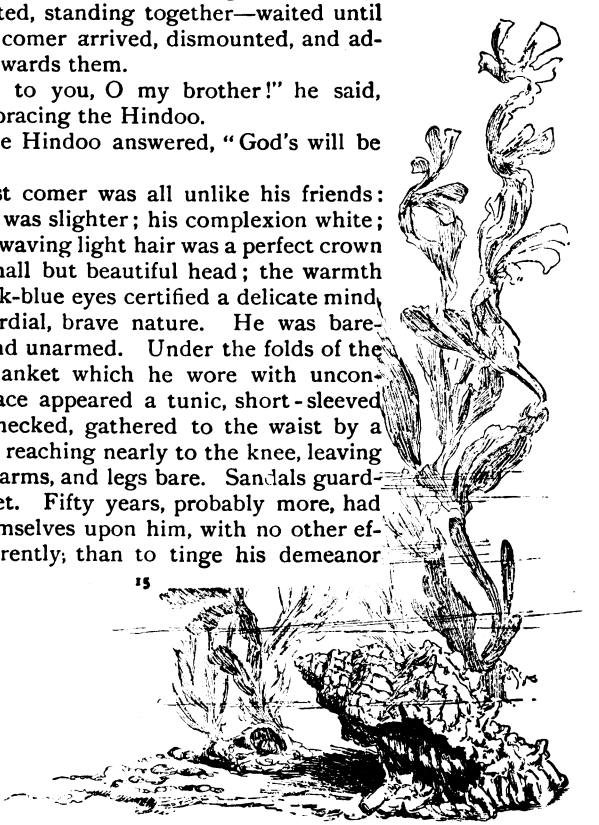
"And blessed are they that serve him!" the Egyptian answered, wondering at the paraphrase of his own exclamation. "But let us wait," he added, "let us wait; for see, the other comes yonder!"

They looked to the north, where, already plain to view, a third camel, of the whiteness of the others, came careening like a ship. They waited, standing together—waited until the new-comer arrived, dismounted, and advanced towards them.

"Peace to you, O my brother!" he said, while embracing the Hindoo.

And the Hindoo answered, "God's will be done!"

The last comer was all unlike his friends: his frame was slighter; his complexion white; a mass of waving light hair was a perfect crown for his small but beautiful head; the warmth of his dark-blue eyes certified a delicate mind, and a cordial, brave nature. He was bare-headed and unarmed. Under the folds of the Tyrian blanket which he wore with unconscious grace appeared a tunic, short-sleeved and low-necked, gathered to the waist by a band, and reaching nearly to the knee, leaving the neck, arms, and legs bare. Sandals guarded his feet. Fifty years, probably more, had spent themselves upon him, with no other effect, apparently, than to tinge his demeanor

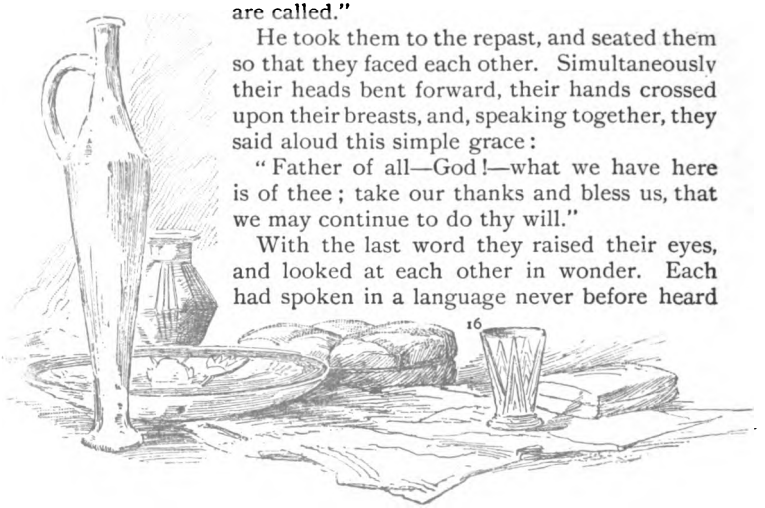


with gravity and temper his words with forethought. The physical organization and the brightness of soul were untouched. No need to tell the student from what kindred he was sprung; if he came not himself from the groves of Athené, his ancestry did.

When his arms fell from the Egyptian, the latter said, with a tremulous voice, "The Spirit brought me first; wherefore I know myself chosen to be the servant of my brethren. The tent is set, and the bread is ready for the breaking. Let me perform my office."

Taking each by the hand, he led them within, and removed their sandals and washed their feet, and he poured water upon their hands, and dried them with napkins.

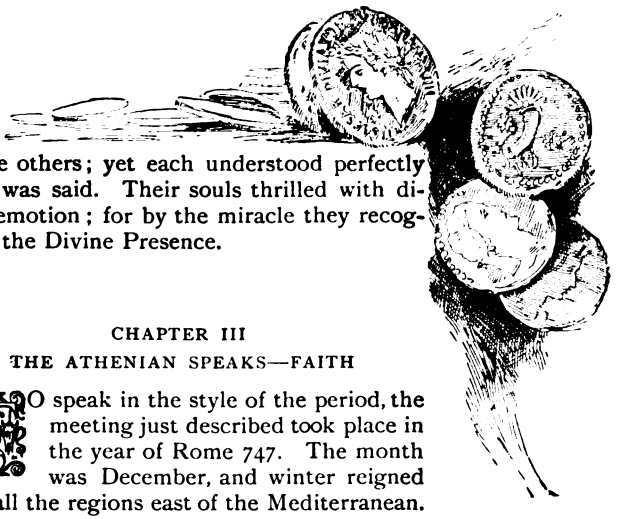
Then, when he had laved his own hands, he said, "Let us take care of ourselves, brethren, as our service requires, and eat, that we may be strong for what remains of the day's duty. While we eat, we will each learn who the others are, and whence they come, and how they are called."



He took them to the repast, and seated them so that they faced each other. Simultaneously their heads bent forward, their hands crossed upon their breasts, and, speaking together, they said aloud this simple grace:

"Father of all—God!—what we have here is of thee; take our thanks and bless us, that we may continue to do thy will."

With the last word they raised their eyes, and looked at each other in wonder. Each had spoken in a language never before heard



by the others; yet each understood perfectly what was said. Their souls thrilled with divine emotion; for by the miracle they recognized the Divine Presence.

CHAPTER III

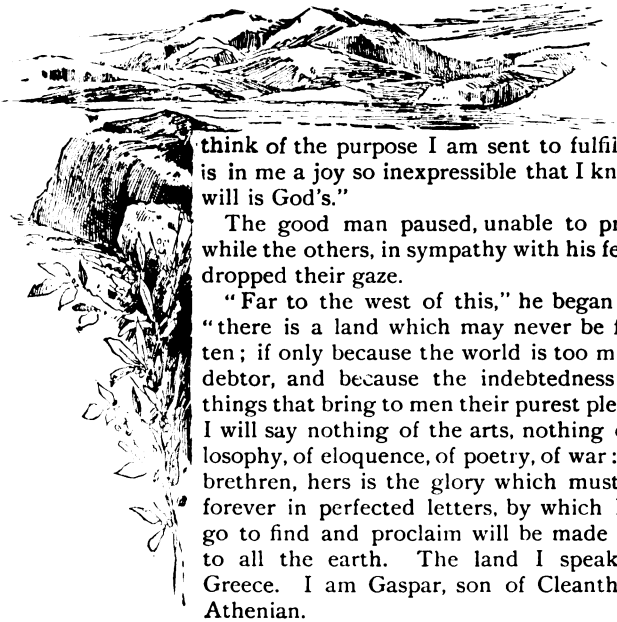
THE ATHENIAN SPEAKS—FAITH

TO speak in the style of the period, the meeting just described took place in the year of Rome 747. The month was December, and winter reigned over all the regions east of the Mediterranean. Such as ride upon the desert in this season go not far until smitten with a keen appetite. The company under the little tent were not exceptions to the rule. They were hungry, and ate heartily; and, after the wine, they talked.

"To a wayfarer in a strange land nothing is so sweet as to hear his name on the tongue of a friend," said the Egyptian, who assumed to be president of the repast. "Before us lie many days of companionship. It is time we knew each other. So, if it be agreeable, he who came last shall be first to speak."

Then, slowly at first, like one watchful of himself, the Greek began:

"What I have to tell, my brethren, is so strange that I hardly know where to begin or what I may with propriety speak. I do not yet understand myself. The most I am sure of is that I am doing a Master's will, and that the service is a constant ecstasy. When I



think of the purpose I am sent to fulfil, there is in me a joy so inexpressible that I know the will is God's."

The good man paused, unable to proceed, while the others, in sympathy with his feelings, dropped their gaze.

"Far to the west of this," he began again, "there is a land which may never be forgotten; if only because the world is too much its debtor, and because the indebtedness is for things that bring to men their purest pleasures. I will say nothing of the arts, nothing of philosophy, of eloquence, of poetry, of war: O my brethren, hers is the glory which must shine forever in perfected letters, by which He we go to find and proclaim will be made known to all the earth. The land I speak of is Greece. I am Gaspar, son of Cleanthes the Athenian.

"My people," he continued, "were given wholly to study, and from them I derived the same passion. It happens that two of our philosophers, the very greatest of the many, teach, one the doctrine of a Soul in every man, and its Immortality; the other the doctrine of One God, infinitely just. From the multitude of subjects about which the schools were disputing, I separated them, as alone worth the labor of solution; for I thought there was a relation between God and the soul as yet unknown. On this theme the mind can reason to a point, a dead, impassable wall; arrived there, all that remains is to stand and cry aloud for help. So I did; but no voice came

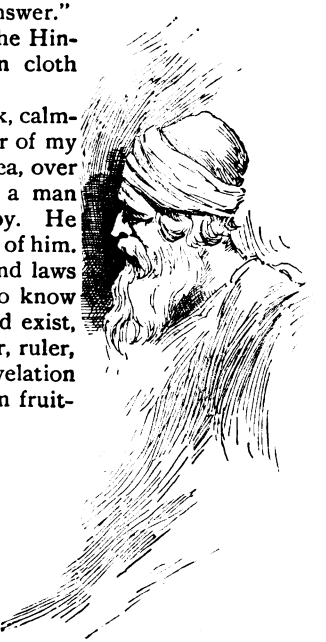
to me over the wall. In despair, I tore myself from the cities and the schools."

At these words a grave smile of approval lighted the gaunt face of the Hindoo.

"In the northern part of my country—in Thessaly," the Greek proceeded to say, "there is a mountain famous as the home of the gods, where Theus, whom my countrymen believe supreme, has his abode; Olympus is its name. Thither I betook myself. I found a cave in a hill where the mountain, coming from the west, bends to the southeast; there I dwelt, giving myself up to meditation—no, I gave myself up to waiting for what every breath was a prayer—for revelation. Believing in God, invisible yet supreme, I also believed it possible so to yearn for him with all my soul that he would take compassion and give me answer."

"And he did—he did!" exclaimed the Hindoo, lifting his hands from the silken cloth upon his lap.

"Hear me, brethren," said the Greek, calming himself with an effort. "The door of my hermitage looks over an arm of the sea, over the Thermaic Gulf. One day I saw a man flung overboard from a ship sailing by. He swam ashore. I received and took care of him. He was a Jew, learned in the history and laws of his people; and from him I came to know that the God of my prayers did indeed exist, and had been for ages their lawmaker, ruler, and king. What was that but the Revelation I dreamed of? My faith had not been fruitless; God answered me!"



"As he does all who cry to him with such faith," said the Hindoo.

"But, alas!" the Egyptian added, "how few are there wise enough to know when he answers them!"

"That was not all," the Greek continued. "The man so sent to me told me more. He said the prophets who, in the ages which followed the first revelation, walked and talked with God, declared he would come again. He gave me the names of the prophets, and from the sacred books quoted their very language. He told me, further, that the second coming was at hand—was looked for momentarily in Jerusalem."

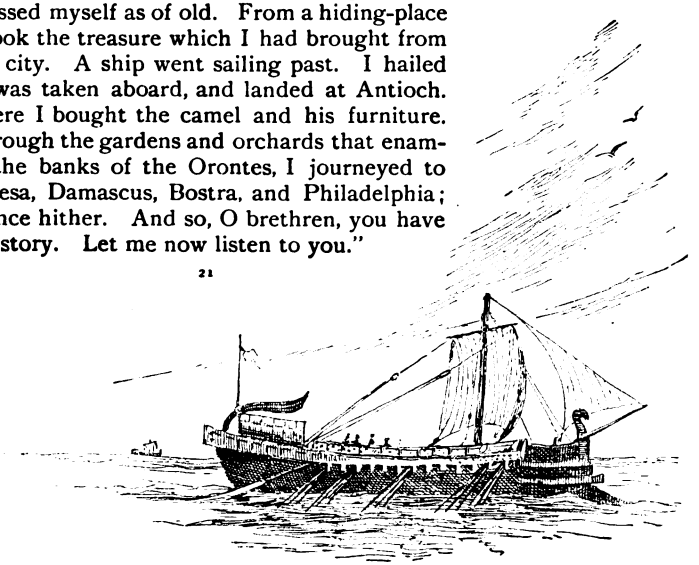
The Greek paused, and the brightness of his countenance faded.

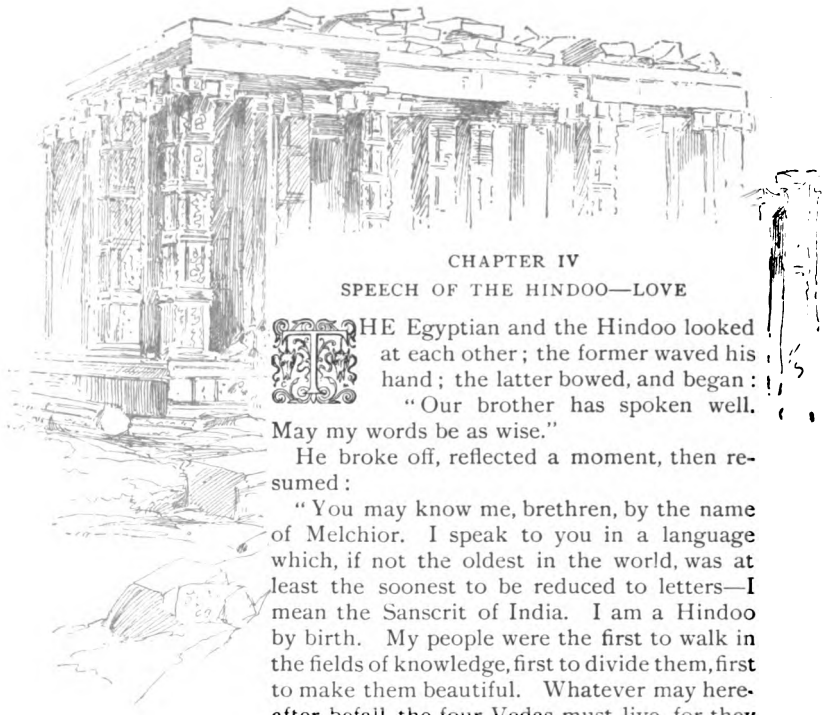
"It is true," he said, after a little—"it is true the man told me that as God and the revelation of which he spoke had been for the Jews alone, so it would be again. He that was to come should be King of the Jews. 'Had he nothing for the rest of the world?' I asked. 'No,' was the answer, given in a proud voice—'No, we are his chosen people.' The answer did not crush my hope. Why should such a God limit his love and benefaction to one land, and, as it were, to one family? I set my heart upon knowing. At last I broke through the man's pride, and found that his fathers had been merely chosen servants to keep the Truth alive, that the world might at last know it and be saved. When the Jew was gone, and I was alone again, I chastened my soul with a new

prayer—that I might be permitted to see the King when he was come, and worship him. One night I sat by the door of my cave trying to get nearer the mysteries of my existence, knowing which is to know God; suddenly, on the sea below me, or rather in the darkness that covered its face, I saw a star begin to burn; slowly it arose and drew nigh, and stood over the hill and above my door, so that its light shone full upon me. I fell down, and slept, and in my dream I heard a voice say:

"'O Gaspar! Thy faith hath conquered! Blessed art thou! With two others, come from the uttermost parts of the earth, thou shalt see Him that is promised, and be a witness for him, and the occasion of testimony in his behalf. In the morning arise, and go meet them, and keep trust in the Spirit that shall guide thee.'

"And in the morning I awoke with the Spirit as a light within me surpassing that of the sun. I put off my hermit's garb, and dressed myself as of old. From a hiding-place I took the treasure which I had brought from the city. A ship went sailing past. I hailed it, was taken aboard, and landed at Antioch. There I bought the camel and his furniture. Through the gardens and orchards that enamel the banks of the Orontes, I journeyed to Emesa, Damascus, Bostra, and Philadelphia; thence hither. And so, O brethren, you have my story. Let me now listen to you."





CHAPTER IV

SPEECH OF THE HINDOO—LOVE

THE Egyptian and the Hindoo looked at each other; the former waved his hand; the latter bowed, and began:

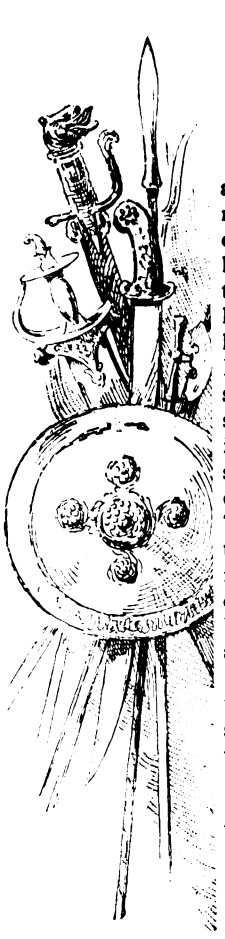
"Our brother has spoken well. May my words be as wise."

He broke off, reflected a moment, then resumed:

"You may know me, brethren, by the name of Melchior. I speak to you in a language which, if not the oldest in the world, was at least the soonest to be reduced to letters—I mean the Sanscrit of India. I am a Hindoo by birth. My people were the first to walk in the fields of knowledge, first to divide them, first to make them beautiful. Whatever may hereafter befall, the four Vedas must live, for they are the primal fountains of religion and useful intelligence. From them were derived the Upa-Vedas, which, delivered by Brahma, treat of medicine, archery, architecture, music, and the four-and-sixty mechanical arts; the Ved-Angas, revealed by inspired saints, and devoted to astronomy, grammar, prosody, pronunciation, charms and incantations, religious rites and ceremonies; the Up-Angas, written by the sage Vyasa, and given to cosmogony, chronology, and geography; therein also are the Ramayâna and the Mahabhârata, heroic poems,

designed for the perpetuation of our gods and demi-gods. Such, O brethren, are the Great Shastras, or books of sacred ordinances. They are dead to me now; yet through all time they will serve to illustrate the budding genius of my race. They were promises of quick perfection. Ask you why the promises failed? Alas! the books themselves closed all the gates of progress. Under pretext of care for the creature, their authors imposed the fatal principle that a man must not address himself to discovery or invention, as Heaven had provided him all things needful. When that condition became a sacred law, the lamp of Hindoo genius was let down a well, where ever since it has lighted narrow walls and bitter waters.

"These allusions, brethren, are not from pride, as you will understand when I tell you that the Shastras teach a Supreme God called Brahm; also, that the Purânas, or sacred poems of the Up-Angas, tell us of Virtue and Good Works, and of the Soul. So, if my brother will permit the saying"—the speaker bowed deferentially to the Greek—"ages before his people were known, the two great ideas, God and the Soul, had absorbed all the forces of the Hindoo mind. In further explanation, let me say that Brahm is taught, by the same sacred books, as a Triad—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Of these, Brahma is said to have been the author of our race; which, in course of creation, he divided into four castes. First, he peopled the worlds below and the heavens



above; next, he made the earth ready for terrestrial spirits; then from his mouth proceeded the Brahman caste, nearest in likeness to himself, highest and noblest, sole teachers of the Vedas, which at the same time flowed from his lips in finished state, perfect in all useful knowledge. From his arms next issued the Kshatriya, or warriors; from his breast, the seat of life, came the Vaisya, or producers—shepherds, farmers, merchants; from his foot, in sign of degradation, sprang the Sudra, or serviles, doomed to menial duties for the other classes—serfs, domestics, laborers, artisans. Take notice, further, that the law, so born with them, forbade a man of one caste becoming a member of another; the Brahman could not enter a lower order; if he violated the laws of his own grade, he became an outcast, lost to all but outcasts like himself."

At this point, the imagination of the Greek, flashing forward upon all the consequences of such a degradation, overcame his eager attention, and he exclaimed, "In such a state, O brethren, what mighty need of a loving God!"

"Yes," added the Egyptian, "of a loving God like ours."

The brows of the Hindoo knit painfully; when the emotion was spent, he proceeded, in a softened voice.

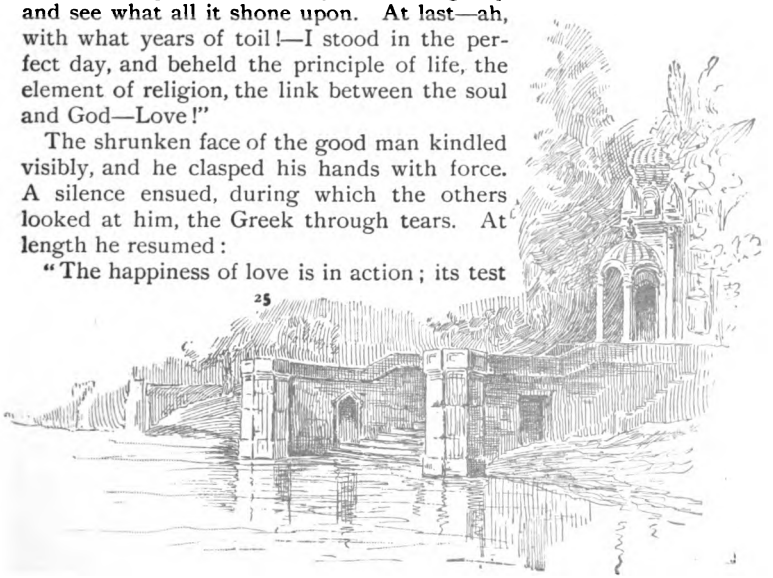
"I was born a Brahman. My life, consequently, was ordered down to its least act, its last hour. My first draught of nourishment; the giving me my compound name; taking me out the first time to see the sun; investing me

with the triple thread by which I became one of the twice-born; my induction into the first order—were all celebrated with sacred texts and rigid ceremonies. I might not walk, eat, drink, or sleep without danger of violating a rule. And the penalty, O brethren, the penalty was to my soul! According to the degrees of omission, my soul went to one of the heavens—Indra's the lowest, Brahma's the highest; or it was driven back to become the life of a worm, a fly, a fish, or a brute. The reward for perfect observance was Beatitude, or absorption into the being of Brahm, which was not existence as much as absolute rest."

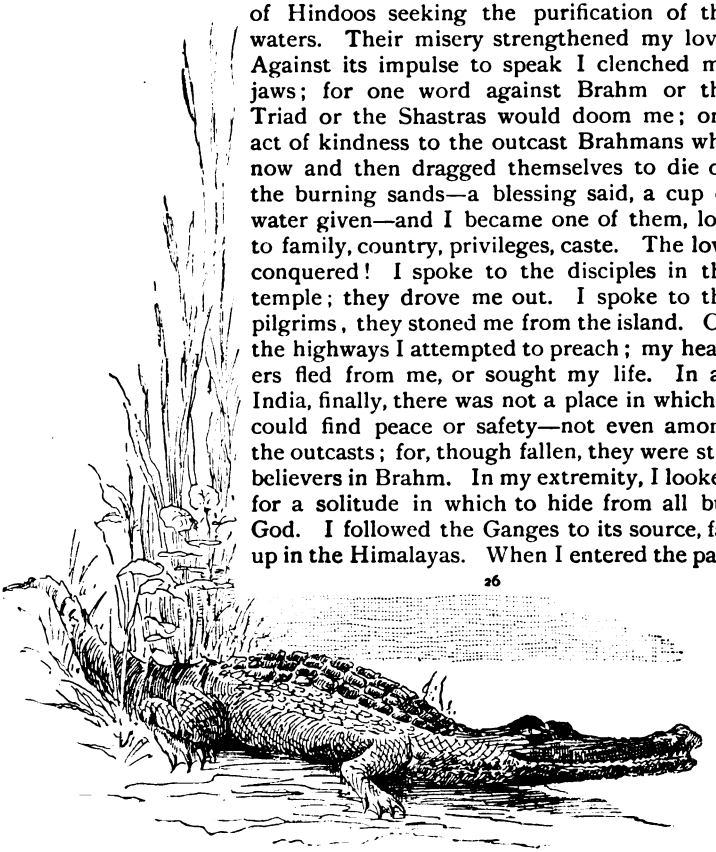
The Hindoo gave himself a moment's thought; proceeding, he said: "The part of a Brahman's life called the first order is his student life. When I was ready to enter the second order—that is to say, when I was ready to marry and become a householder—I questioned everything, even Brahm; I was a heretic. From the depths of the well I had discovered a light above, and yearned to go up and see what all it shone upon. At last—ah, with what years of toil!—I stood in the perfect day, and beheld the principle of life, the element of religion, the link between the soul and God—Love!"

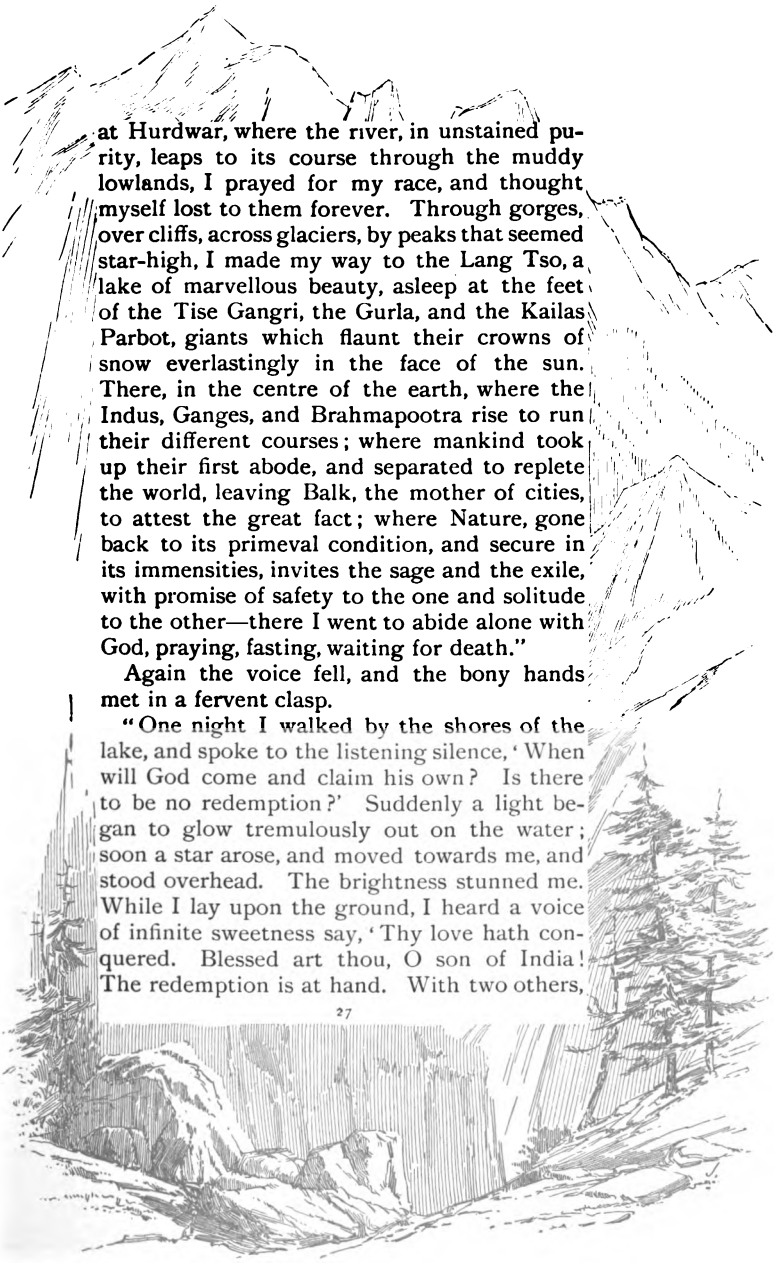
The shrunken face of the good man kindled visibly, and he clasped his hands with force. A silence ensued, during which the others looked at him, the Greek through tears. At length he resumed:

"The happiness of love is in action; its test



is what one is willing to do for others. I could not rest. Brahm had filled the world with so much wretchedness. The Sudra appealed to me; so did the countless devotees and victims. The island of Ganga Lagor lies where the sacred waters of the Ganges disappear in the Indian Ocean. Thither I betook myself. In the shade of the temple built there to the sage Kapila, in a union of prayers with the disciples whom the sanctified memory of the holy man keeps around his house, I thought to find rest. But twice every year came pilgrimages of Hindoos seeking the purification of the waters. Their misery strengthened my love. Against its impulse to speak I clenched my jaws; for one word against Brahm or the Triad or the Shastras would doom me; one act of kindness to the outcast Brahmans who now and then dragged themselves to die on the burning sands—a blessing said, a cup of water given—and I became one of them, lost to family, country, privileges, caste. The love conquered! I spoke to the disciples in the temple; they drove me out. I spoke to the pilgrims, they stoned me from the island. On the highways I attempted to preach; my hearers fled from me, or sought my life. In all India, finally, there was not a place in which I could find peace or safety—not even among the outcasts; for, though fallen, they were still believers in Brahm. In my extremity, I looked for a solitude in which to hide from all but God. I followed the Ganges to its source, far up in the Himalayas. When I entered the pass





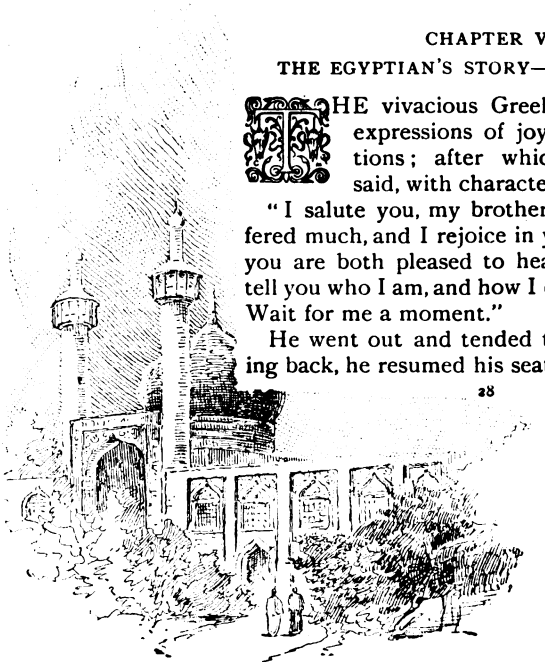
at Hurdwar, where the river, in unstained purity, leaps to its course through the muddy lowlands, I prayed for my race, and thought myself lost to them forever. Through gorges, over cliffs, across glaciers, by peaks that seemed star-high, I made my way to the Lang Tso, a lake of marvellous beauty, asleep at the feet of the Tise Gangri, the Gurla, and the Kailas Parbot, giants which flaunt their crowns of snow everlastingly in the face of the sun. There, in the centre of the earth, where the Indus, Ganges, and Brahmapootra rise to run their different courses; where mankind took up their first abode, and separated to replete the world, leaving Balk, the mother of cities, to attest the great fact; where Nature, gone back to its primeval condition, and secure in its immensities, invites the sage and the exile, with promise of safety to the one and solitude to the other—there I went to abide alone with God, praying, fasting, waiting for death."

Again the voice fell, and the bony hands met in a fervent clasp.

"One night I walked by the shores of the lake, and spoke to the listening silence, 'When will God come and claim his own? Is there to be no redemption?' Suddenly a light began to glow tremulously out on the water; soon a star arose, and moved towards me, and stood overhead. The brightness stunned me. While I lay upon the ground, I heard a voice of infinite sweetness say, 'Thy love hath conquered. Blessed art thou, O son of India! The redemption is at hand. With two others,

from far quarters of the earth, thou shalt see the Redeemer, and be a witness that he hath come. In the morning arise, and go meet them; and put all thy trust in the Spirit which shall guide thee.'

"And from that time the light has stayed with me; so I knew it was the visible presence of the Spirit. In the morning I started to the world by the way I had come. In a cleft of the mountain I found a stone of vast worth, which I sold in Hurdwar. By Lahore, and Cabool, and Yezd, I came to Ispahan. There I bought the camel, and thence was led to Bagdad, not waiting for caravans. Alone I travelled, fearless, for the Spirit was with me, and is with me yet. What glory is ours, O brethren! We are to see the Redeemer—to speak to him—to worship him? I am done."



CHAPTER V

THE EGYPTIAN'S STORY—GOOD WORKS

THE vivacious Greek broke forth in expressions of joy and congratulations; after which the Egyptian said, with characteristic gravity:

"I salute you, my brother. You have suffered much, and I rejoice in your triumph. If you are both pleased to hear me, I will now tell you who I am, and how I came to be called. Wait for me a moment."

He went out and tended the camels; coming back, he resumed his seat.

"Your words, brethren, were of the Spirit," he said, in commencement; "and the Spirit gives me to understand them. You each spoke particularly of your countries; in that there was a great object, which I will explain; but to make the interpretation complete, let me first speak of myself and my people. I am Balthasar the Egyptian."

The last words were spoken quietly, but with so much dignity that both listeners bowed to the speaker.

"There are many distinctions I might claim for my race," he contined; "but I will content myself with one. History began with us. We were the first to perpetuate events by records kept. So we have no traditions; and instead of poetry, we offer you certainty. On the façades of palaces and temples, on obelisks, on the inner walls of tombs, we wrote the names of our kings, and what they did; and to the delicate papyri we intrusted the wisdom of our philosophers and the secrets of our religion—all the secrets but one, whereof I will presently speak. Older than the Vedas of Para-Brahm or the Up-Angas of Vyasa, O Melchior; older than the songs of Homer or the metaphysics of Plato, O my Gaspar; older than the sacred books or kings of the people of China, or those of Siddârtha, son of the beautiful Maya; older than the Genesis of Moschè the Hebrew—oldest of human records are the writings of Menes, our first king." Pausing an instant, he fixed his large eyes kindly upon the Greek, saying, "In the youth of Hel-

las, who, O Gaspar, were the teachers of her teachers?"

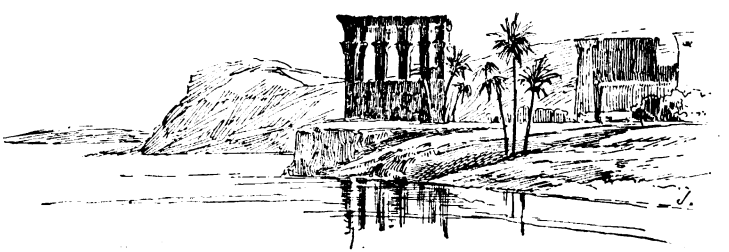
The Greek bowed, smiling.

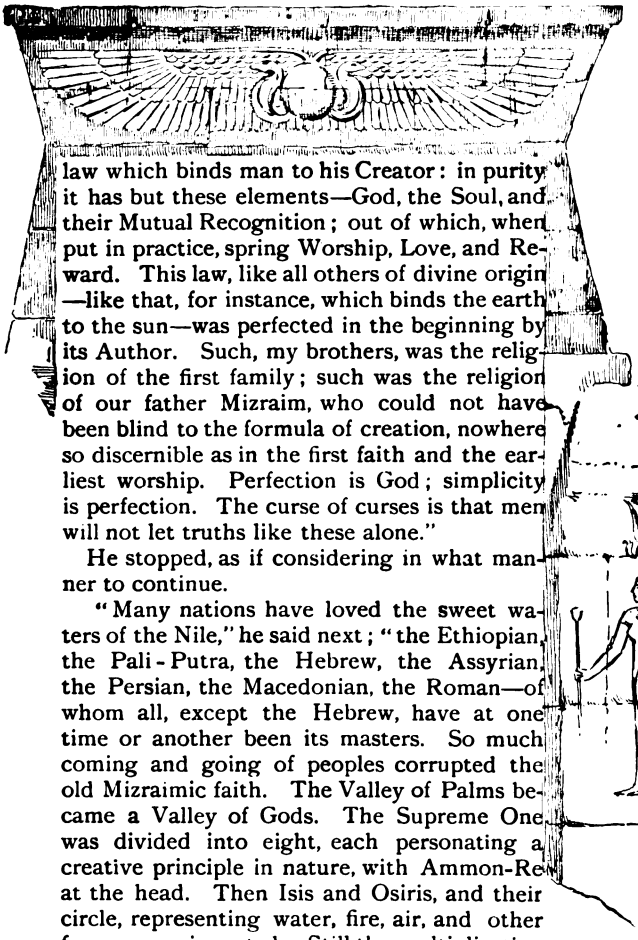
"By those records," Balthasar continued, "we know that when the fathers came from the far East, from the region of the birth of the three sacred rivers, from the centre of the earth — the Old Iran of which you spoke, O Melchior—came bringing with them the history of the world before the Flood, and of the Flood itself, as given to the Aryans by the sons of Noah, they taught God, the Creator and the Beginning, and the Soul deathless as God. When the duty which calls us now is happily done, if you choose to go with me, I will show you the sacred library of our priesthood; among others, the Book of the Dead, in which is the ritual to be observed by the soul after Death has despatched it on its journey to judgment. The ideas — God and the Immortal Soul — were borne to Mizraim over the desert, and by him to the banks of the Nile. They were then in their purity, easy of understanding, as what God intends for our happiness always is; so, also, was the first worship—a song and a prayer natural to a soul joyous, hopeful, and in love with its Maker."

Here the Greek threw up his hands, exclaiming, "Oh! the light deepens within me!"

"And in me!" said the Hindoo, with equal fervor.

The Egyptian regarded them benignantly, then went on, saying, "Religion is merely the





law which binds man to his Creator: in purity it has but these elements—God, the Soul, and their Mutual Recognition; out of which, when put in practice, spring Worship, Love, and Reward. This law, like all others of divine origin—like that, for instance, which binds the earth to the sun—was perfected in the beginning by its Author. Such, my brothers, was the religion of the first family; such was the religion of our father Mizraim, who could not have been blind to the formula of creation, nowhere so discernible as in the first faith and the earliest worship. Perfection is God; simplicity is perfection. The curse of curses is that men will not let truths like these alone."

He stopped, as if considering in what manner to continue.

"Many nations have loved the sweet waters of the Nile," he said next; "the Ethiopian, the Pali-Putra, the Hebrew, the Assyrian, the Persian, the Macedonian, the Roman—of whom all, except the Hebrew, have at one time or another been its masters. So much coming and going of peoples corrupted the old Mizraimic faith. The Valley of Palms became a Valley of Gods. The Supreme One was divided into eight, each personating a creative principle in nature, with Ammon-Re at the head. Then Isis and Osiris, and their circle, representing water, fire, air, and other forces, were invented. Still the multiplication went on until we had another order, suggested by human qualities, such as strength, knowledge, love, and the like."

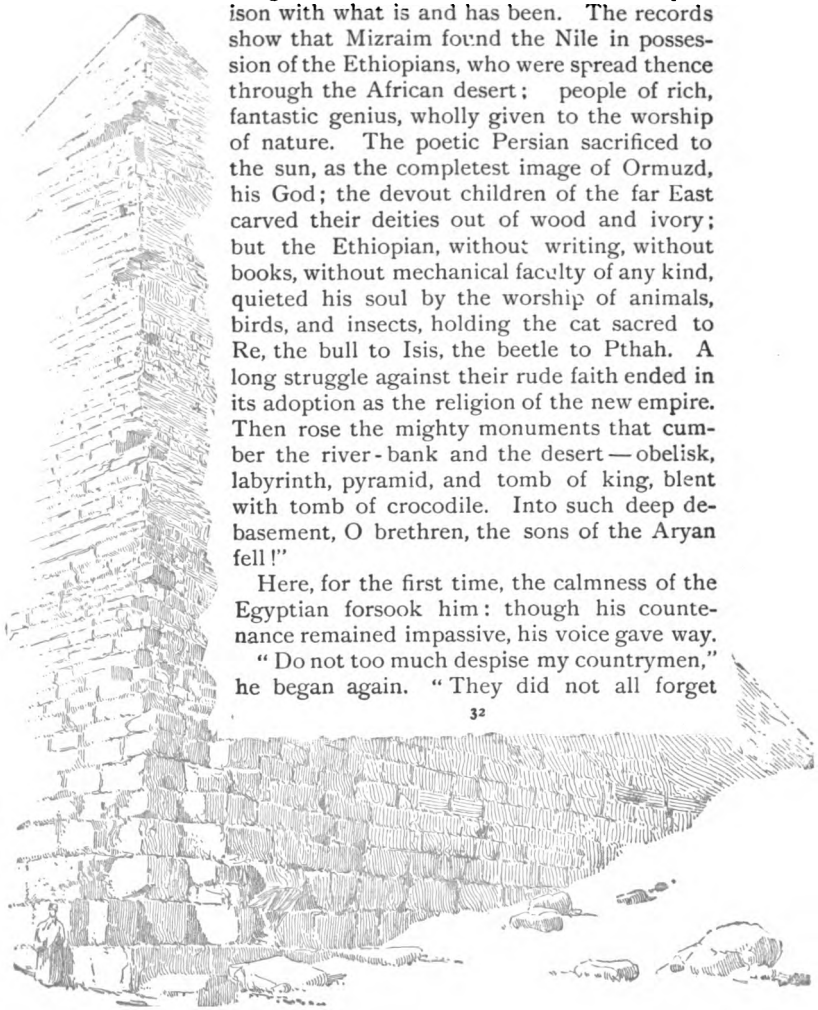
"In all which there was the old folly!" cried the Greek, impulsively. "Only the things out of reach remain as they came to us."

The Egyptian bowed, and proceeded:

"Yet a little further, O my brethren, a little further, before I come to myself. What we go to will seem all the holier of comparison with what is and has been. The records show that Mizraim found the Nile in possession of the Ethiopians, who were spread thence through the African desert; people of rich, fantastic genius, wholly given to the worship of nature. The poetic Persian sacrificed to the sun, as the completest image of Ormuzd, his God; the devout children of the far East carved their deities out of wood and ivory; but the Ethiopian, without writing, without books, without mechanical faculty of any kind, quieted his soul by the worship of animals, birds, and insects, holding the cat sacred to Re, the bull to Isis, the beetle to Pthah. A long struggle against their rude faith ended in its adoption as the religion of the new empire. Then rose the mighty monuments that cumber the river-bank and the desert — obelisk, labyrinth, pyramid, and tomb of king, blent with tomb of crocodile. Into such deep debasement, O brethren, the sons of the Aryan fell!"

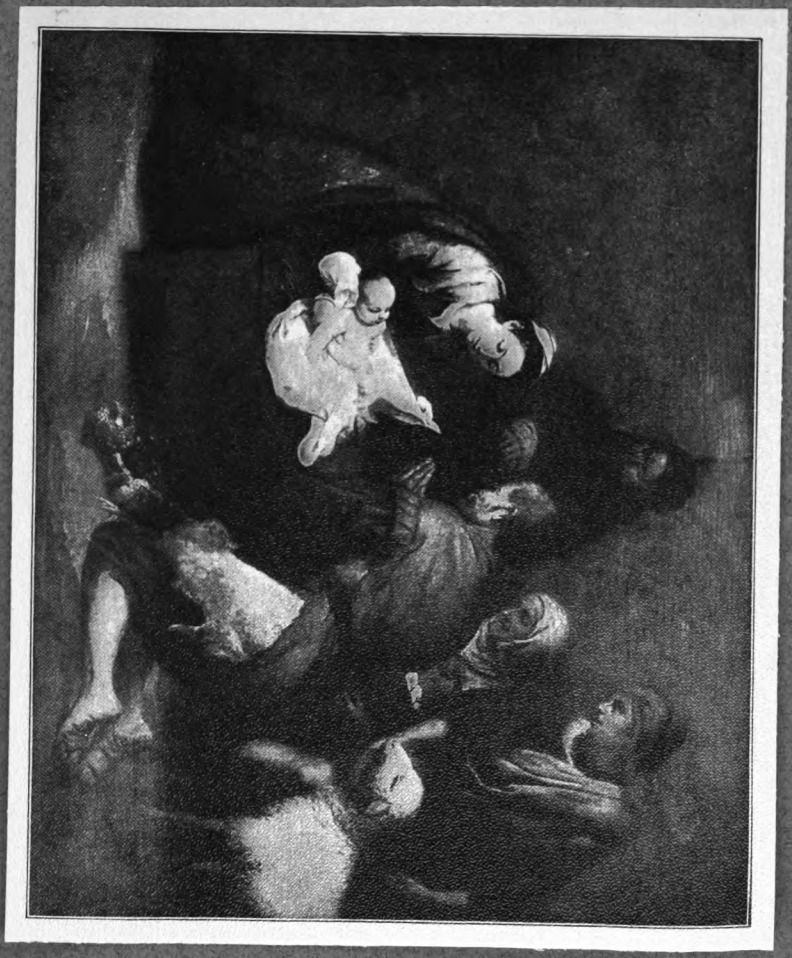
Here, for the first time, the calmness of the Egyptian forsook him: though his countenance remained impassive, his voice gave way.

"Do not too much despise my countrymen," he began again. "They did not all forget



THE ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS

(From a painting by Murillo in the Prado, Madrid)



God. I said awhile ago, you may remember, that to papyri we intrusted all the secrets of our religion except one; of that I will now tell you. We had as king once a certain Pharaoh, who lent himself to all manner of changes and additions. To establish the new system, he strove to drive the old entirely out of mind. The Hebrews then dwelt with us as slaves. They clung to their God; and when the persecution became intolerable, they were delivered in a manner never to be forgotten. I speak from the records now. Mosché, himself a Hebrew, came to the palace, and demanded permission for the slaves, then millions in number, to leave the country. The demand was in the name of the Lord God of Israel. Pharaoh refused. Hear what followed. First, all the water, that in the lakes and rivers, like that in the wells and vessels, turned to blood. Yet the monarch refused. Then frogs came up and covered all the land. Still he was firm. Then Mosché threw ashes in the air, and a plague attacked the Egyptians. Next, all the cattle, except of the Hebrews, were struck dead. Locusts devoured the green things of the valley. At noon the day was turned into a darkness so thick that lamps would not burn. Finally, in the night all the first-born of the Egyptians died; not even Pharaoh's escaped. Then he yielded. But when the Hebrews were gone he followed them with his army. At the last moment the sea was divided, so that the fugitives passed it dry-shod. When the pursuers drove in after

them, the waves rushed back and drowned horse, foot, charioteers, and king. You spoke of revelation, my Gaspar—"

The blue eyes of the Greek sparkled.

"I had the story from the Jew," he cried. "You confirm it, O Balthasar!"

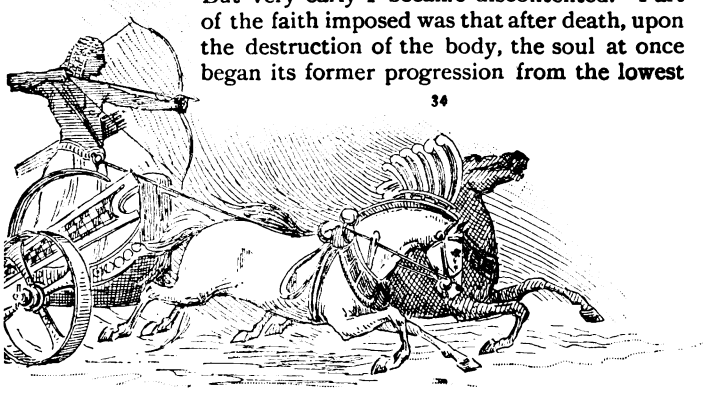
"Yes, but through me Egypt speaks, not Mosché. I interpret the marbles. The priests of that time wrote in their way what they witnessed, and the revelation has lived. So I come to the one unrecorded secret. In my country, brethren, we have, from the day of the unfortunate Pharaoh, always had two religions—one private, the other public; one of many gods, practised by the people; the other of one God, cherished only by the priesthood. Rejoice with me, O brothers! All the trampling by the many nations, all the harrowing by kings, all the inventions of enemies, all the changes of time, have been in vain. Like a seed under the mountains waiting its hour, the glorious Truth has lived; and this—this is its day!"

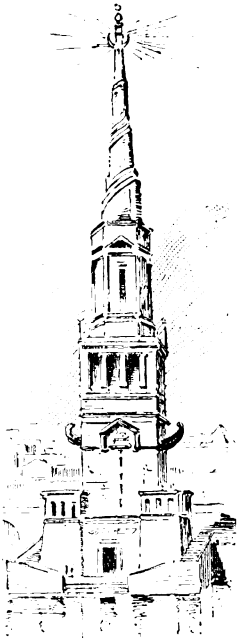
The wasted frame of the Hindoo trembled with delight, and the Greek cried aloud,

"It seems to me the very desert is singing."

From a gurglet of water near by the Egyptian took a draught, and proceeded:

"I was born at Alexandria, a prince and a priest, and had the education usual to my class. But very early I became discontented. Part of the faith imposed was that after death, upon the destruction of the body, the soul at once began its former progression from the lowest





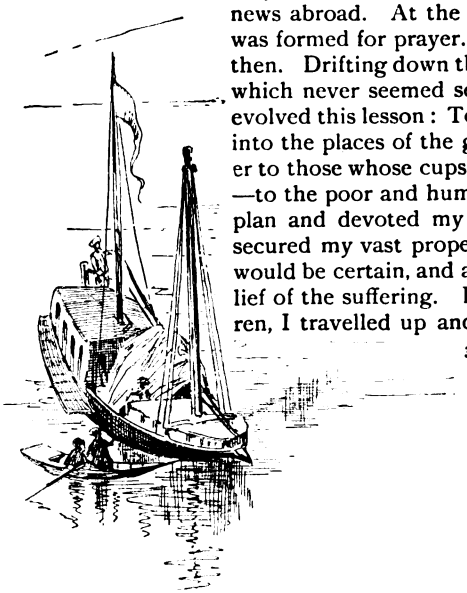
up to humanity, the highest and last existence; and that without reference to conduct in the mortal life. When I heard of the Persian's Realm of Light, his Paradise across the bridge Chinevat, where only the good go, the thought haunted me; insomuch that in the day, as in the night, I brooded over the comparative ideas Eternal Transmigration and Eternal Life in Heaven. If, as my teacher taught, God was just, why was there no distinction between the good and the bad? At length it became clear to me, a certainty, a corollary of the law to which I reduced pure religion, that death was only the point of separation at which the wicked are left or lost, and the faithful rise to a higher life; not the nirvana of Buddha, or the negative rest of Brahma, O Melchior; nor the better condition in hell, which is all of Heaven allowed by the Olympic faith, O Gaspar; but life—life active, joyous, everlasting—LIFE WITH GOD! The discovery led to another inquiry. Why should the Truth be longer kept a secret for the selfish solace of the priesthood? The reason for the suppression was gone. Philosophy had at least brought us toleration. In Egypt we had Rome instead of Rameses. One day, in the Brucheium, the most splendid and crowded quarter of Alexandria, I arose and preached. The East and West contributed to my audience. Students going to the Library, priests from the Serapeion, idlers from the Museum, patrons of the race-course, countrymen from the Rhacotis—a multitude—stopped to hear me. I preached

God, the Soul, Right and Wrong, and Heaven, the reward of a virtuous life. You, O Melchior, were stoned; my auditors first wondered, then laughed. I tried again; they pelted me with epigrams, covered my God with ridicule, and darkened my Heaven with mockery. Not to linger needlessly, I fell before them."

The Hindoo here drew a long sigh, as he said, "The enemy of man is man, my brother."

Balthasar lapsed into silence.

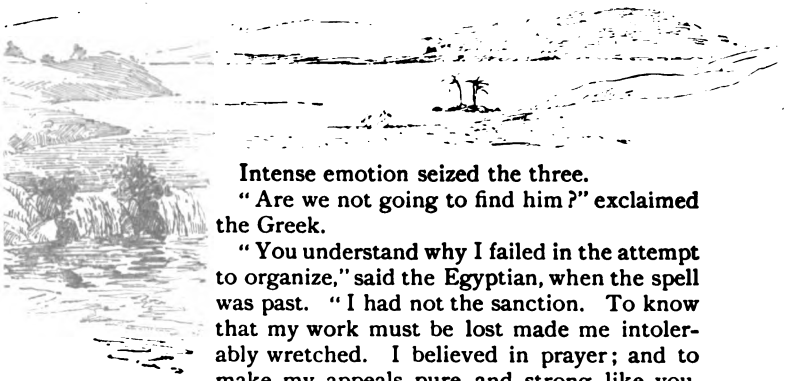
"I gave much thought to finding the cause of my failure, and at last succeeded," he said, upon beginning again. "Up the river, a day's journey from the city, there is a village of herdsmen and gardeners. I took a boat and went there. In the evening I called the people together, men and women, the poorest of the poor. I preached to them exactly as I had preached in the Brucheium. They did not laugh. Next evening I spoke again, and they believed and rejoiced, and carried the news abroad. At the third meeting a society was formed for prayer. I returned to the city then. Drifting down the river, under the stars, which never seemed so bright and so near, I evolved this lesson: To begin a reform, go not into the places of the great and rich; go rather to those whose cups of happiness are empty —to the poor and humble. And then I laid a plan and devoted my life. As a first step, I secured my vast property, so that the income would be certain, and always at call for the relief of the suffering. From that day, O brethren, I travelled up and down the Nile, in the



villages, and to all the tribes, preaching One God, a righteous life, and reward in Heaven. I have done good—it does not become me to say how much. I also know that part of the world to be ripe for the reception of Him we go to find.

A flush suffused the swarthy cheek of the speaker; but he overcame the feeling, and continued:

"The years so given, O my brothers, were troubled by one thought—When I was gone, what would become of the cause I had started? Was it to end with me? I had dreamed many times of organization as a fitting crown for my work. To hide nothing from you, I had tried to effect it, and failed. Brethren, the world is now in the condition that, to restore the old Mizraimic faith, the reformer must have a more than human sanction; he must not merely come in God's name, he must have the proofs subject to his word; he must demonstrate all he says, even God. So preoccupied is the mind with myths and systems; so much do false deities crowd every place—earth, air, sky; so have they become of everything a part, that return to the first religion can only be along bloody paths, through fields of persecution; that is to say, the converts must be willing to die rather than recant. And who in this age can carry the faith of men to such a point but God himself? To redeem the race—I do not mean to destroy it—to redeem the race, he must make himself once more manifest; HE MUST COME IN PERSON."



Intense emotion seized the three.

"Are we not going to find him?" exclaimed the Greek.

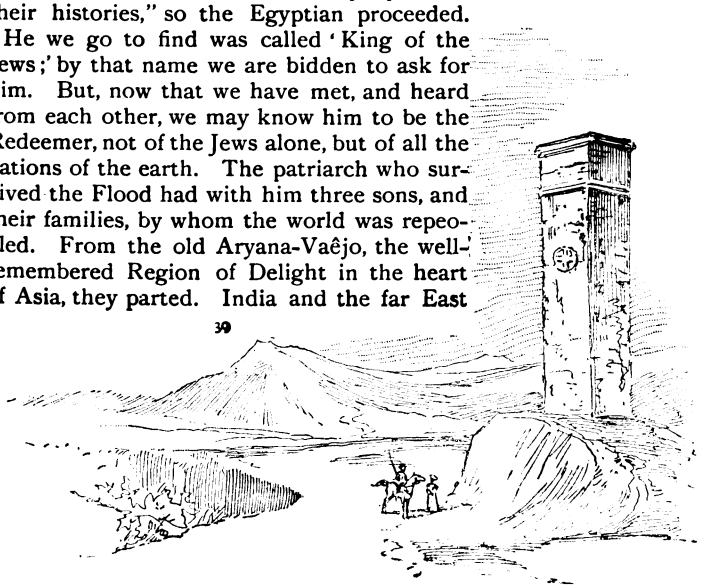
"You understand why I failed in the attempt to organize," said the Egyptian, when the spell was past. "I had not the sanction. To know that my work must be lost made me intolerably wretched. I believed in prayer; and to make my appeals pure and strong, like you, my brethren, I went out of the beaten ways, I went where man had not been, where only God was. Above the fifth cataract, above the meeting of rivers in Sennar, up the Bahr el Abiad, into the far unknown of Africa, I went. There, in the morning, a mountain blue as the sky flings a cooling shadow wide over the western desert, and, with its cascades of melted snow, feeds a broad lake nestling at its base on the east. The lake is the mother of the great river. For a year and more the mountain gave me a home. The fruit of the palm fed my body, prayer my spirit. One night I walked in the orchard close by the little sea. 'The world is dying. When wilt thou come? Why may I not see the redemption, O God?' So I prayed. The glassy water was sparkling with stars. One of them seemed to leave its place, and rise to the surface, where it became a brilliancy burning to the eyes. Then it moved towards me, and stood over my head, apparently in hand's reach. I fell down and hid my face. A voice, not of the earth, said, 'Thy good works have conquered. Blessed art thou, O son of Mizraim! The redemption cometh. With two

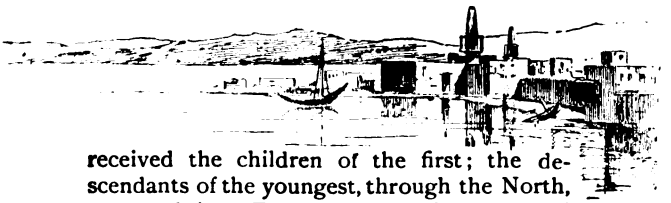
others, from the remotenesses of the world, thou shalt see the Saviour, and testify for him. In the morning arise, and go meet them. And when ye have all come to the holy city of Jerusalem, ask of the people, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the East, and are sent to worship him. Put all thy trust in the Spirit which will guide thee.'

"And the light became an inward illumination not to be doubted, and has stayed with me, a governor and a guide. It led me down the river to Memphis, where I made ready for the desert. I bought my camel, and came hither without rest, by way of Suez and Kufileh, and up through the lands of Moab and Ammon. God is with us, O my brethren!"

He paused, and thereupon, with a prompting not their own, they all arose, and looked at each other.

"I said there was a purpose in the particularity with which we described our peoples and their histories," so the Egyptian proceeded. "He we go to find was called 'King of the Jews;' by that name we are bidden to ask for him. But, now that we have met, and heard from each other, we may know him to be the Redeemer, not of the Jews alone, but of all the nations of the earth. The patriarch who survived the Flood had with him three sons, and their families, by whom the world was repeopled. From the old Aryana-Vaêjo, the well-remembered Region of Delight in the heart of Asia, they parted. India and the far East





received the children of the first; the descendants of the youngest, through the North, streamed into Europe; those of the second overflowed the deserts about the Red Sea, passing into Africa; and though most of the latter are yet dwellers in shifting tents, some of them became builders along the Nile."

By a simultaneous impulse the three joined hands.

"Could anything be more divinely ordered?" Balthasar continued. "When we have found the Lord, the brothers, and all the generations that have succeeded them, will kneel to him in homage with us. And when we part to go our separate ways, the world will have learned a new lesson—that Heaven may be won, not by the sword, not by human wisdom, but by Faith, Love, and Good Works."

There was silence, broken by sighs and sanctified with tears; for the joy that filled them might not be stayed. It was the unspeakable joy of souls on the shores of the River of Life, resting with the Redeemed in God's presence.

Presently their hands fell apart, and together they went out of the tent. The desert was still as the sky. The sun was sinking fast. The camels slept.

A little while after, the tent was struck, and, with the remains of the repast, restored to the cot; then the friends mounted, and set out single file, led by the Egyptian. Their course was due west, into the chilly night. The camels swung forward in steady trot, keeping the line and the intervals so exactly that those

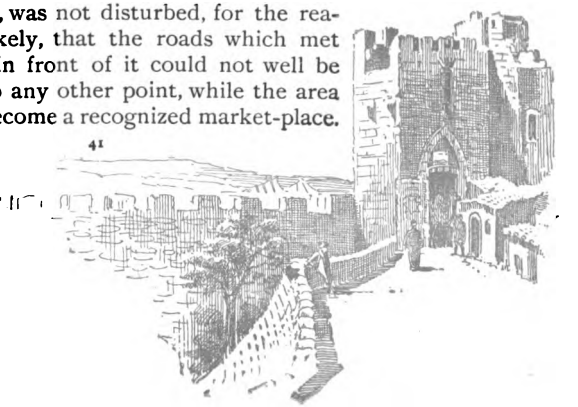
following seemed to tread in the tracks of the leader. The riders spoke not once.

By-and-by the moon came up. And as the three tall white figures sped, with soundless tread, through the opalescent light, they appeared like spectres flying from hateful shadows. Suddenly, in the air before them, not farther up than a low hill-top, flared a lambent flame; as they looked at it, the apparition contracted into a focus of dazzling lustre. Their hearts beat fast; their souls thrilled; and they shouted as with one voice, "The Star! the Star! God is with us!"

CHAPTER VI

THE JOPPA GATE

IN an aperture of the western wall of Jerusalem hang the "oaken valves" called the Bethlehem or Joppa Gate. The area outside of them is one of the notable places of the city. Long before David coveted Zion there was a citadel there. When at last the son of Jesse ousted the Jebusite, and began to build, the site of the citadel became the north-west corner of the new wall, defended by a tower much more imposing than the old one. The location of the gate, however, was not disturbed, for the reasons, most likely, that the roads which met and merged in front of it could not well be transferred to any other point, while the area outside had become a recognized market-place.



In Solomon's day there was great traffic at the locality, shared in by traders from Egypt and the rich dealers from Tyre and Sidon. Nearly three thousand years have passed, and yet a kind of commerce clings to the spot. A pilgrim wanting a pin or a pistol, a cucumber or a camel, a house or a horse, a loan or a lentil, a date or a dragoman, a melon or a man, a dove or a donkey, has only to inquire for the article at the Joppa Gate. Sometimes the scene is quite animated, and then it suggests, What a place the old market must have been in the days of Herod the Builder! And to that period and that market the reader is now to be transferred.

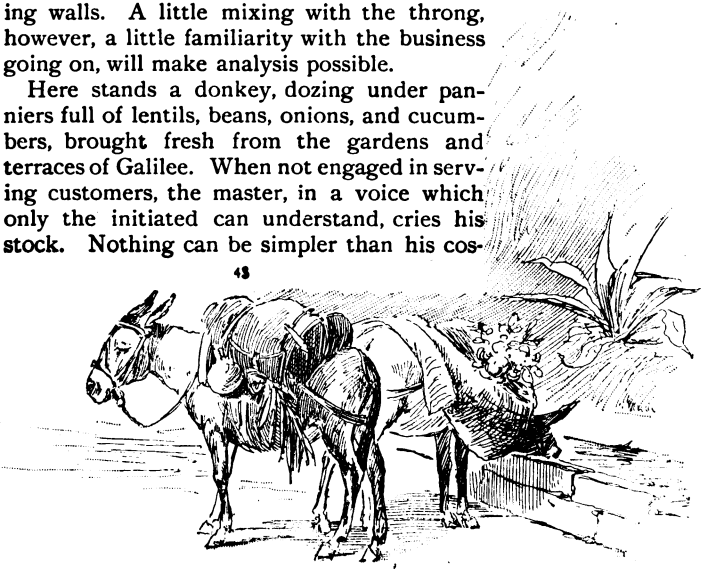
Following the Hebrew system, the meeting of the wise men described in the preceding chapters took place in the afternoon of the twenty-fifth day of the third month of the year; that is to say, on the twenty-fifth day of December. The year was the second of the 193d Olympiad, or the 747th of Rome; the sixty-seventh of Herod the Great, and the thirty-fifth of his reign; the fourth before the beginning of the Christian era. The hours of the day, by Judean custom, begin with the sun, the first hour being the first after sunrise; so, to be precise, the market at the Joppa Gate during the first hour of the day stated was in full session, and very lively. The massive valves had been wide open since dawn. Business, always aggressive, had pushed through the arched entrance into a narrow lane and court, which, passing by the walls of the great

tower, conducted on into the city. As Jerusalem is in the hill country, the morning air on this occasion was not a little crisp. The rays of the sun, with their promise of warmth, lingered provokingly far up on the battlements and turrets of the great piles about, down from which fell the crooning of pigeons and the whir of the flocks coming and going.

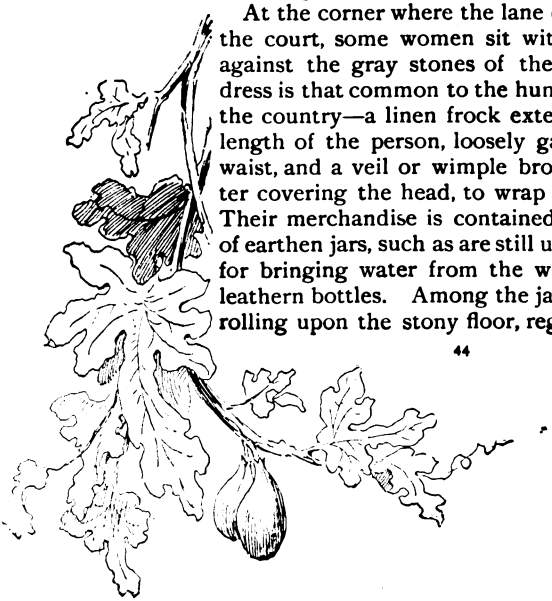
As a passing acquaintance with the people of the Holy City, strangers as well as residents, will be necessary to an understanding of some of the pages which follow, it will be well to stop at the gate and pass the scene in review. Better opportunity will not offer to get sight of the populace who will after a while go forward in a mood very different from that which now possesses them.

The scene is at first one of utter confusion — confusion of action, sounds, colors, and things. It is especially so in the lane and court. The ground there is paved with broad unshaped flags, from which each cry and jar and hoof-stamp arises to swell the medley that rings and roars up between the solid impending walls. A little mixing with the throng, however, a little familiarity with the business going on, will make analysis possible.

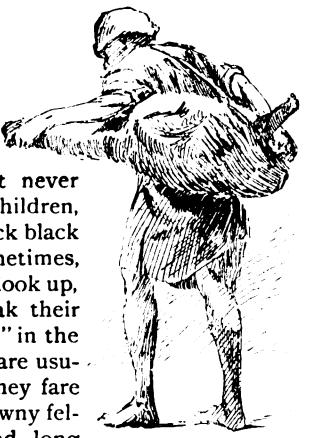
Here stands a donkey, dozing under panniers full of lentils, beans, onions, and cucumbers, brought fresh from the gardens and terraces of Galilee. When not engaged in serving customers, the master, in a voice which only the initiated can understand, cries his stock. Nothing can be simpler than his cos-



tume — sandals, and an unbleached, undyed blanket, crossed over one shoulder and girt round the waist. Near-by, and far more imposing and grotesque, though scarcely as patient as the donkey, kneels a camel, raw-boned, rough, and gray, with long shaggy tufts of fox-colored hair under its throat, neck, and body, and a load of boxes and baskets curiously arranged upon an enormous saddle. The owner is an Egyptian, small, lithe, and of a complexion which has borrowed a good deal from the dust of the roads and the sands of the desert. He wears a faded tarbooshe, a loose gown, sleeveless, unbelted, and dropping from the neck to the knee. His feet are bare. The camel, restless under the load, groans and occasionally shows his teeth; but the man paces indifferently to and fro, holding the driving-strap, and all the time advertising his fruits fresh from the orchards of the Kedron—grapes, dates, figs, apples, and pomegranates.



At the corner where the lane opens out into the court, some women sit with their backs against the gray stones of the wall. Their dress is that common to the humbler classes of the country—a linen frock extending the full length of the person, loosely gathered at the waist, and a veil or wimple broad enough, after covering the head, to wrap the shoulders. Their merchandise is contained in a number of earthen jars, such as are still used in the East for bringing water from the wells, and some leathern bottles. Among the jars and bottles, rolling upon the stony floor, regardless of the



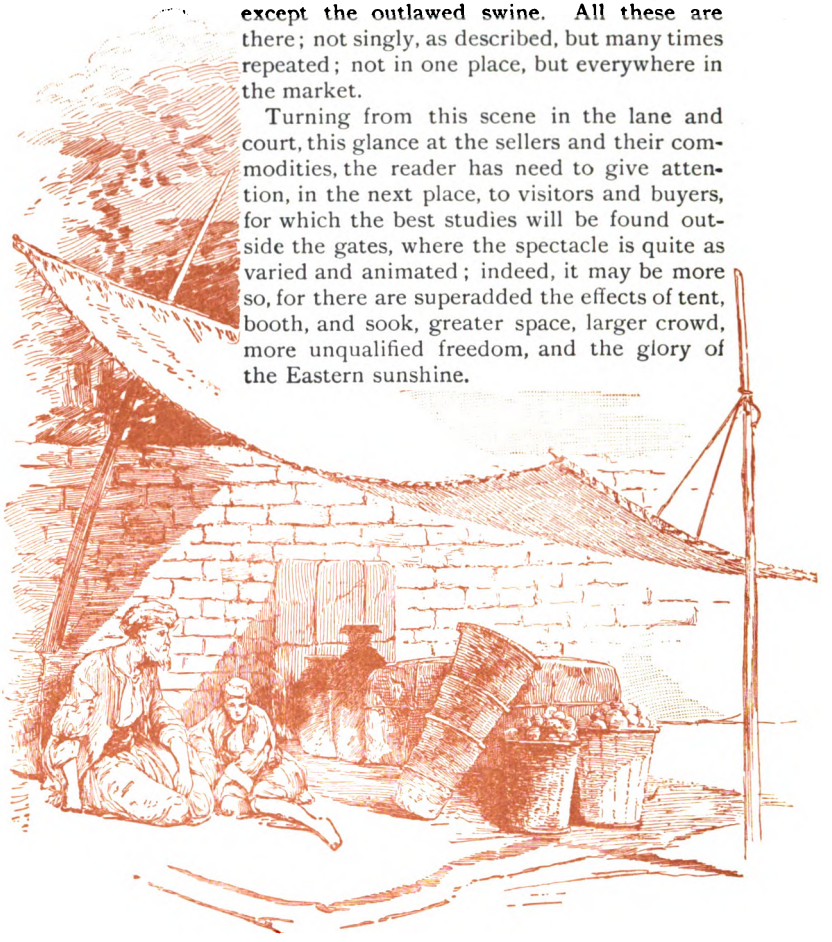
crowd and cold, often in danger but never hurt, play half a dozen half-naked children, their brown bodies, jetty eyes, and thick black hair attesting the blood of Israel. Sometimes, from under the wimples, the mothers look up, and in the vernacular modestly bespeak their trade: in the bottles "honey of grapes," in the jars "strong drink." Their entreaties are usually lost in the general uproar, and they fare illy against the many competitors: brawny fellows with bare legs, dirty tunics, and long beards, going about with bottles lashed to their backs, and shouting "Honey of wine! Grapes of En-Gedi!" When a customer halts one of them, round comes the bottle, and, upon lifting the thumb from the nozzle, out into the ready cup gushes the deep-red blood of the luscious berry.

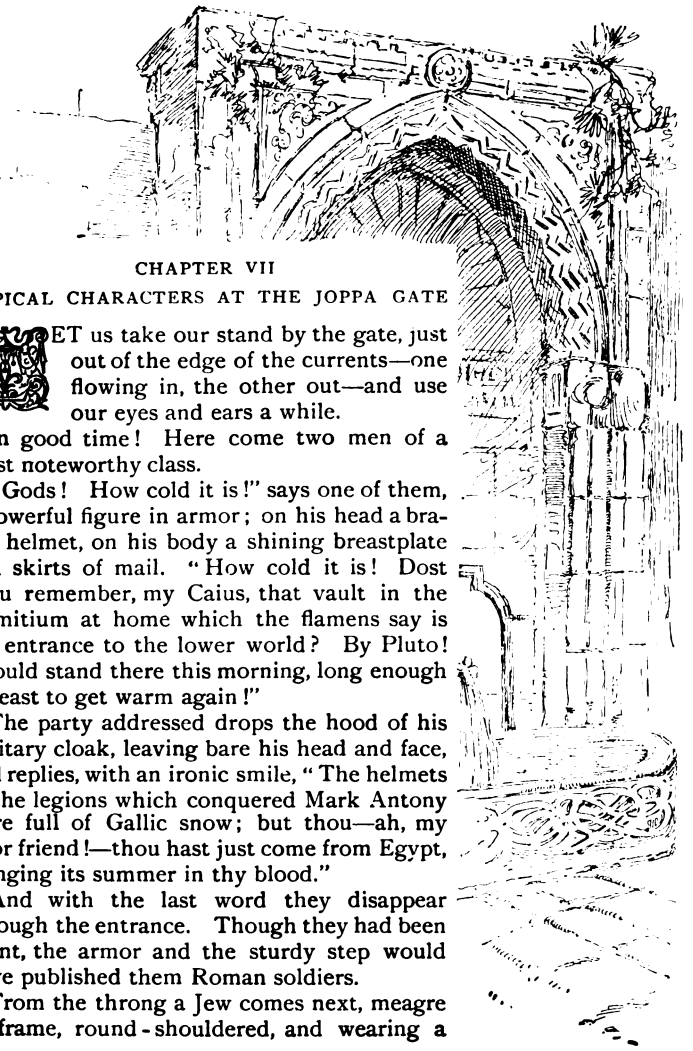
Scarcely less blatant are the dealers in birds —doves, ducks, and frequently the singing bulbul, or nightingale, most frequently pigeons; and buyers, receiving them from the nets, seldom fail to think of the perilous life of the catchers, bold climbers of the cliffs; now hanging with hand and foot to the face of the crag, now swinging in a basket far down the mountain fissure.

Blent with peddlers of jewelry—sharp men cloaked in scarlet and blue, top-heavy under prodigious white turbans, and fully conscious of the power there is in the lustre of a ribbon and the incisive gleam of gold, whether in bracelet or necklace, or in rings for the finger or the nose—and with peddlers of household

utensils, and with dealers in wearing-apparel, and with retailers of unguents for anointing the person, and with hucksters of all articles, fanciful as well as of need, hither and thither, tugging at halters and ropes, now screaming, now coaxing, toil the venders of animals—donkeys, horses, calves, sheep, bleating kids, and awkward camels; animals of every kind except the outlawed swine. All these are there; not singly, as described, but many times repeated; not in one place, but everywhere in the market.

Turning from this scene in the lane and court, this glance at the sellers and their commodities, the reader has need to give attention, in the next place, to visitors and buyers, for which the best studies will be found outside the gates, where the spectacle is quite as varied and animated; indeed, it may be more so, for there are superadded the effects of tent, booth, and sook, greater space, larger crowd, more unqualified freedom, and the glory of the Eastern sunshine.





CHAPTER VII

TYPICAL CHARACTERS AT THE JOPPA GATE

LET us take our stand by the gate, just out of the edge of the currents—one flowing in, the other out—and use our eyes and ears a while.

In good time! Here come two men of a most noteworthy class.

"Gods! How cold it is!" says one of them, a powerful figure in armor; on his head a brazen helmet, on his body a shining breastplate and skirts of mail. "How cold it is! Dost thou remember, my Caius, that vault in the Comitium at home which the flamens say is the entrance to the lower world? By Pluto! I could stand there this morning, long enough at least to get warm again!"

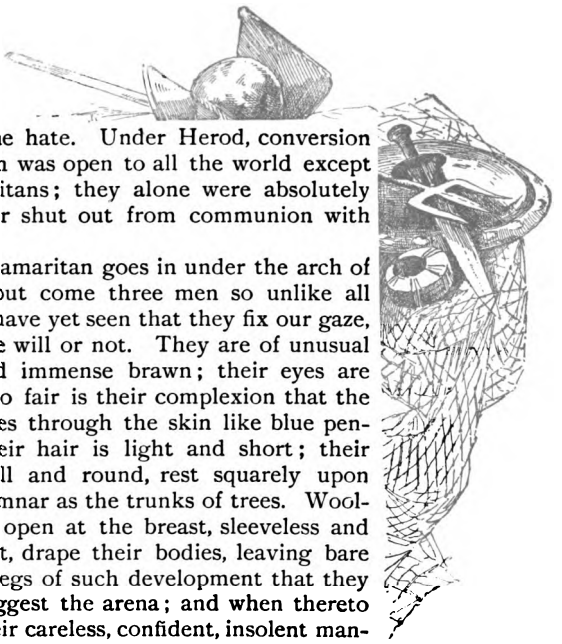
The party addressed drops the hood of his military cloak, leaving bare his head and face, and replies, with an ironic smile, "The helmets of the legions which conquered Mark Antony were full of Gallic snow; but thou—ah, my poor friend!—thou hast just come from Egypt, bringing its summer in thy blood."

And with the last word they disappear through the entrance. Though they had been silent, the armor and the sturdy step would have published them Roman soldiers.

From the throng a Jew comes next, meagre of frame, round-shouldered, and wearing a

coarse brown robe; over his eyes and face, and down his back hangs a mat of long uncombed hair. He is alone. Those who meet him laugh, if they do not worse; for he is a Nazarite, one of a despised sect which rejects the books of Moses, devotes itself to abhorred vows, and goes unshorn while the vows endure.

As we watch his retiring figure, suddenly there is a commotion in the crowd, a parting quickly to the right and left, with exclamations sharp and decisive. Then the cause comes—a man, Hebrew in feature and dress. The mantle of snow-white linen, held to his head by cords of yellow silk, flows free over his shoulders; his robe is richly embroidered; a red sash with fringes of gold wraps his waist several times. His demeanor is calm; he even smiles upon those who, with such rude haste, make room for him. A leper? No, he is only a Samaritan. The shrinking crowd, if asked, would say he is a mongrel—an Assyrian—whose touch of the robe is pollution, from whom, consequently, an Israelite, though dying, might not accept life. In fact, the feud is not of blood. When David set his throne here on Mount Zion, with only Judah to support him, the ten tribes betook themselves to Shechem, a city much older, and, at that date, infinitely richer in holy memories. The final union of the tribes did not settle the dispute thus begun. The Samaritans clung to their tabernacle on Gerizim, and, while maintaining its superior sanctity, laughed at the irate doctors in Jerusalem. Time brought no assuage-



ment of the hate. Under Herod, conversion to the faith was open to all the world except the Samaritans; they alone were absolutely and forever shut out from communion with Jews.

As the Samaritan goes in under the arch of the gate, out come three men so unlike all whom we have yet seen that they fix our gaze, whether we will or not. They are of unusual stature and immense brawn; their eyes are blue, and so fair is their complexion that the blood shines through the skin like blue pencilling; their hair is light and short; their heads, small and round, rest squarely upon necks columnar as the trunks of trees. Woollen tunics, open at the breast, sleeveless and loosely girt, drape their bodies, leaving bare arms and legs of such development that they at once suggest the arena; and when thereto we add their careless, confident, insolent manner, we cease to wonder that the people give them way, and stop after they have passed to look at them again. They are gladiators—wrestlers, runners, boxers, swordsmen; professionals unknown in Judea before the coming of the Roman; fellows who, what time they are not in training, may be seen strolling through the king's gardens or sitting with the guards at the palace gates; or possibly they are visitors from Cæsarea, Sebaste, or Jericho; in which Herod, more Greek than Jew, and with all a Roman's love of games and bloody spectacles, has built vast theatres, and now keeps schools of fighting-men, drawn, as is the

custom, from the Gallic provinces or the Slavic tribes on the Danube.

"By Bacchus!" says one of them, drawing his clinched hand to his shoulder, "their skulls are not thicker than egg-shells."

The brutal look which goes with the gesture disgusts us, and we turn happily to something more pleasant.

Opposite us is a fruit-stand. The proprietor has a bald head, a long face, and a nose like the beak of a hawk. He sits upon a carpet spread upon the dust; the wall is at his back; overhead hangs a scant curtain; around him, within hand's reach, and arranged upon little stools, lie osier boxes full of almonds, grapes, figs, and pomegranates. To him now comes one at whom we cannot help looking, though for another reason than that which fixed our eyes upon the gladiators: he is really beautiful—a beautiful Greek. Around his temples, holding the waving hair, is a crown of myrtle, to which still cling the pale flowers and half-ripe berries. His tunic, scarlet in color, is of the softest woollen fabric; below the girdle of buff leather, which is clasped in front by a fantastic device of shining gold, the skirt drops to the knee in folds heavy with embroidery of the same royal metal; a scarf, also woollen, and of mixed white and yellow, crosses his throat and falls trailing at his back; his arms and legs, where exposed, are white as ivory, and of the polish impossible except by perfect treatment with bath, oil, brushes, and pincers.

The dealer, keeping his seat, bends forward,

and throws his hands up until they meet in front of him, palm downward and fingers extended.

"What hast thou, this morning, O son of Paphos?" says the young Greek, looking at the boxes rather than at the Cypriote. "I am hungry. What hast thou for breakfast?"

"Fruits from the Pedius—genuine—such as the singers of Antioch take of mornings to restore the waste of their voices," the dealer answers, in a querulous nasal tone.

"A fig, but not one of thy best, for the singers of Antioch!" says the Greek. "Thou art a worshipper of Aphrodite, and so am I, as the myrtle I wear proves; therefore I tell thee their voices have the chill of a Caspian wind. Seest thou this girdle?—a gift of the mighty Salome—"

"The king's sister!" exclaims the Cypriote, with another salaam.

"And of royal taste and divine judgment. And why not? She is more Greek than the king. But—my breakfast! Here is thy money—red coppers of Cyprus. Give me grapes, and—"

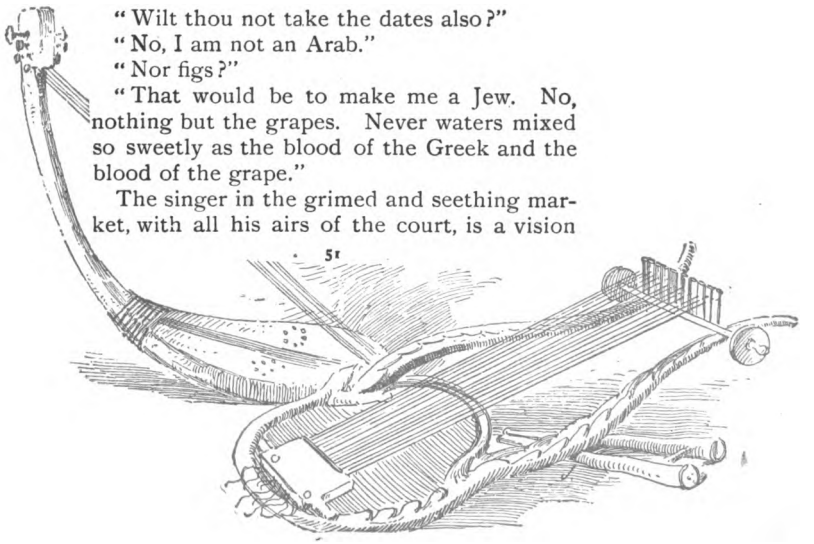
"Wilt thou not take the dates also?"

"No, I am not an Arab."

"Nor figs?"

"That would be to make me a Jew. No, nothing but the grapes. Never waters mixed so sweetly as the blood of the Greek and the blood of the grape."

The singer in the grimed and seething market, with all his airs of the court, is a vision

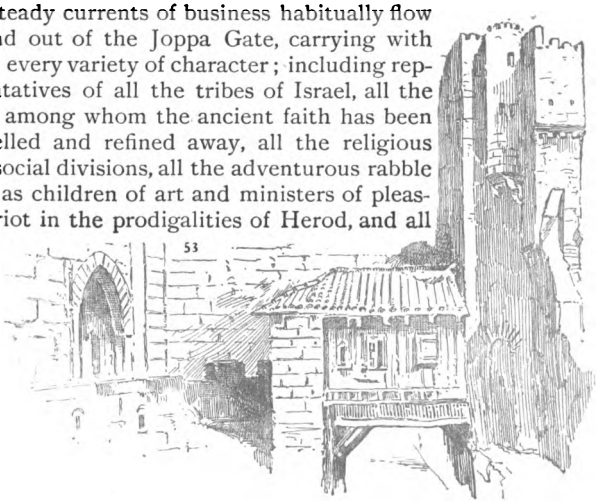


not easily shut out of mind by such as see him; as if for the purpose, however, a person follows him challenging all our wonder. He comes up the road slowly, his face towards the ground; at intervals he stops, crosses his hands upon his breast, lengthens his countenance, and turns his eyes towards heaven, as if about to break into prayer. Nowhere, except in Jerusalem, can such a character be found. On his forehead, attached to the band which keeps the mantle in place, projects a leathern case, square in form; another similar case is tied by a thong to the left arm; the borders of his robe are decorated with deep fringe; and by such signs—the phylacteries, the enlarged borders of the garment, and the savor of intense holiness pervading the whole man—we know him to be a Pharisee, one of an organization (in religion a sect, in politics a party) whose bigotry and power will shortly bring the world to grief.

The densest of the throng outside the gate covers the road leading off to Joppa. Turning from the Pharisee, we are attracted by some parties who, as subjects of study, opportunely separate themselves from the motley crowd. First among them a man of very noble appearance—clear, healthful complexion; bright black eyes; beard long and flowing, and rich with unguents; apparel well-fitting, costly, and suitable for the season. He carries a staff, and wears, suspended by a cord from his neck, a large golden seal. Several servants attend him, some of them with short swords

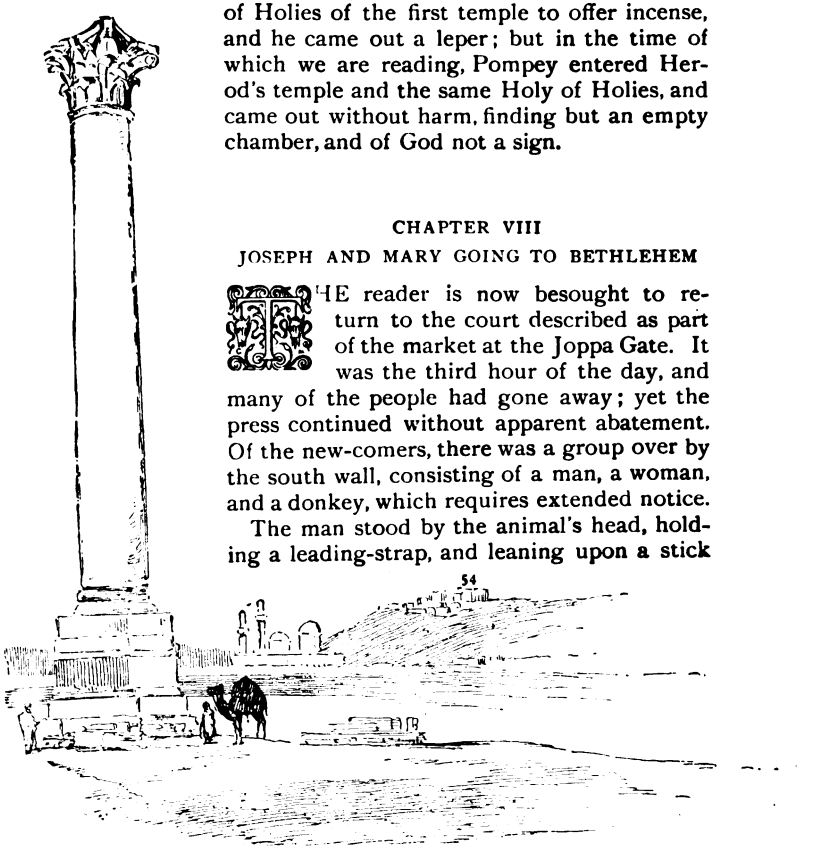
stuck through their sashes; when they address him, it is with the utmost deference. The rest of the party consists of two Arabs of the pure desert stock; thin, wiry men, deeply bronzed, and with hollow cheeks, and eyes of almost evil brightness; on their heads red tarbooshes; over their abas, and wrapping the left shoulder and the body so as to leave the right arm free, brown woollen haicks, or blankets. There is loud chaffering; for the Arabs are leading horses and trying to sell them; and in their eagerness they speak in high, shrill voices. The courtly person leaves the talking mostly to his servants; occasionally he answers with much dignity; directly, seeing the Cypriote, he stops and buys some figs. And when the whole party has passed the portal, close after the Pharisee, if we betake ourselves to the dealer in fruits, he will tell, with a wonderful salaam, that the stranger is a Jew, one of the princes of the city, who has travelled, and learned the difference between the common grapes of Syria and those of Cyprus, so surpassingly rich with the dews of the sea.

And so, till towards noon, sometimes later, the steady currents of business habitually flow in and out of the Joppa Gate, carrying with them every variety of character; including representatives of all the tribes of Israel, all the sects among whom the ancient faith has been parcelled and refined away, all the religious and social divisions, all the adventurous rabble who, as children of art and ministers of pleasure, riot in the prodigalities of Herod, and all



the peoples of note at any time compassed by the Cæsars and their predecessors, especially those dwelling within the circuit of the Mediterranean.

In other words, Jerusalem, rich in sacred history, richer in connection with sacred prophecies — the Jerusalem of Solomon, in which silver was as stones, and cedars as the sycamores of the vale—had come to be but a copy of Rome, a centre of unholy practices, a seat of pagan power. A Jewish king one day put on priestly garments, and went into the Holy of Holies of the first temple to offer incense, and he came out a leper; but in the time of which we are reading, Pompey entered Herod's temple and the same Holy of Holies, and came out without harm, finding but an empty chamber, and of God not a sign.



CHAPTER VIII

JOSEPH AND MARY GOING TO BETHLEHEM

THE reader is now besought to return to the court described as part of the market at the Joppa Gate. It was the third hour of the day, and many of the people had gone away; yet the press continued without apparent abatement. Of the new-comers, there was a group over by the south wall, consisting of a man, a woman, and a donkey, which requires extended notice.

The man stood by the animal's head, holding a leading-strap, and leaning upon a stick

which seemed to have been chosen for the double purpose of goad and staff. His dress was like that of the ordinary Jews around him, except that it had an appearance of newness. The mantle dropping from his head, and the robe or frock which clothed his person from neck to heel, were probably the garments he was accustomed to wear to the synagogue on Sabbath days. His features were exposed, and they told of fifty years of life, a surmise confirmed by the gray that streaked his otherwise black beard. He looked around him with the half-curious, half-vacant stare of a stranger and provincial.

The donkey ate leisurely from an armful of green grass, of which there was an abundance in the market. In its sleepy content, the brute did not admit of disturbance from the bustle and clamor about; no more was it mindful of the woman sitting upon its back in a cushioned pillion. An outer robe of dull woollen stuff completely covered her person, while a white wimple veiled her head and neck. Once in a while, impelled by curiosity to see or hear something passing, she drew the wimple aside, but so slightly that the face remained invisible.

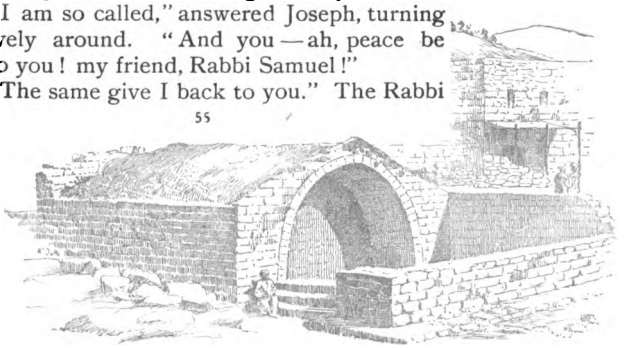
At length the man was accosted.

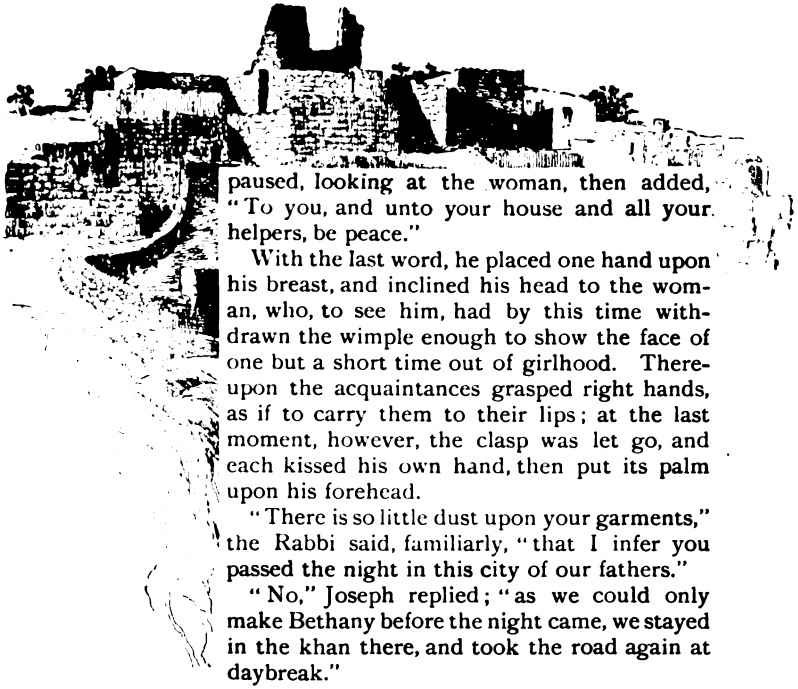
"Are you not Joseph of Nazareth?"

The speaker was standing close by.

"I am so called," answered Joseph, turning gravely around. "And you — ah, peace be unto you! my friend, Rabbi Samuel!"

"The same give I back to you." The Rabbi





paused, looking at the woman, then added, "To you, and unto your house and all your helpers, be peace."

With the last word, he placed one hand upon his breast, and inclined his head to the woman, who, to see him, had by this time withdrawn the wimple enough to show the face of one but a short time out of girlhood. Thereupon the acquaintances grasped right hands, as if to carry them to their lips; at the last moment, however, the clasp was let go, and each kissed his own hand, then put its palm upon his forehead.

"There is so little dust upon your garments," the Rabbi said, familiarly, "that I infer you passed the night in this city of our fathers."

"No," Joseph replied; "as we could only make Bethany before the night came, we stayed in the khan there, and took the road again at daybreak."

"The journey before you is long, then—not to Joppa, I hope."

"Only to Bethlehem."

The countenance of the Rabbi, theretofore open and friendly, became lowering and sinister, and he cleared his throat with a growl instead of a cough.

"Yes, yes—I see," he said. "You were born in Bethlehem, and wend thither now, with your daughter, to be counted for taxation, as ordered by Cæsar. The children of Jacob are as the tribes in Egypt were—only they have neither a Moses nor a Joshua. How are the mighty fallen!"

Joseph answered, without change of posture or countenance,

"The woman is not my daughter."

But the Rabbi clung to the political idea; and he went on, without noticing the explanation, "What are the Zealots doing down in Galilee?"

"I am a carpenter, and Nazareth is a village," said Joseph, cautiously. "The street on which my bench stands is not a road leading to any city. Hewing wood and sawing plank leave me no time to take part in the disputes of parties."

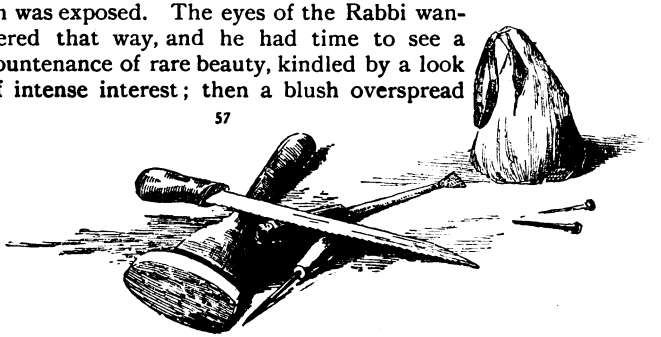
"But you are a Jew," said the Rabbi, earnestly. "You are a Jew, and of the line of David. It is not possible you can find pleasure in the payment of any tax except the shekel given by ancient custom to Jehovah."

Joseph held his peace.

"I do not complain," his friend continued, "of the amount of the tax—a denarius is a trifle. Oh no! The imposition of the tax is the offence. And, besides, what is paying it but submission to tyranny? Tell me, is it true that Judas claims to be the Messiah? You live in the midst of his followers."

"I have heard his followers say he was the Messiah," Joseph replied.

At this point the wimple was drawn aside, and for an instant the whole face of the woman was exposed. The eyes of the Rabbi wandered that way, and he had time to see a countenance of rare beauty, kindled by a look of intense interest; then a blush overspread



her cheeks and brow, and the veil was returned to its place.

The politician forgot his subject.

"Your daughter is comely," he said, speaking lower.

"She is not my daughter," Joseph repeated.

The curiosity of the Rabbi was aroused; seeing which, the Nazarene hastened to say further, "She is the child of Joachim and Anna of Bethlehem, of whom you have at least heard; for they were of great repute—"

"Yes," remarked the Rabbi, deferentially, "I know them. They were lineally descended from David. I knew them well."

"Well, they are dead now," the Nazarene proceeded. "They died in Nazareth. Joachim was not rich, yet he left a house and garden to be divided between his daughters Marian and Mary. This is one of them; and to save her portion of the property, the law required her to marry her next of kin. She is now my wife."

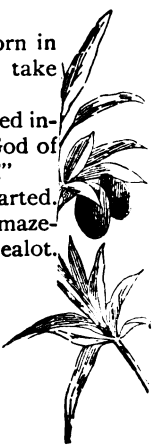
"And you were—"

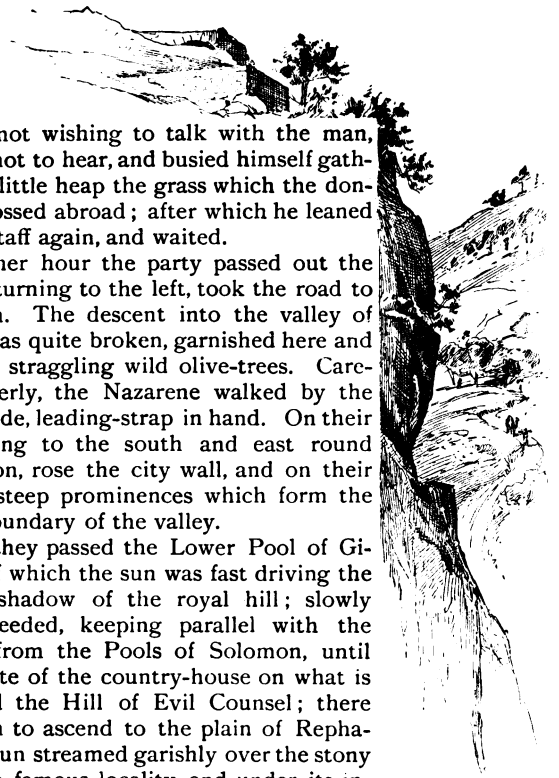
"Her uncle."

"Yes, yes! And as you were both born in Bethlehem, the Roman compels you to take her there with you to be also counted."

The Rabbi clasped his hands, and looked indignantly to heaven, exclaiming, "The God of Israel still lives! The vengeance is his!"

With that he turned and abruptly departed. A stranger near by, observing Joseph's amazement, said, quietly, "Rabbi Samuel is a zealot. Judas himself is not more fierce."





Joseph, not wishing to talk with the man, appeared not to hear, and busied himself gathering in a little heap the grass which the donkey had tossed abroad; after which he leaned upon his staff again, and waited.

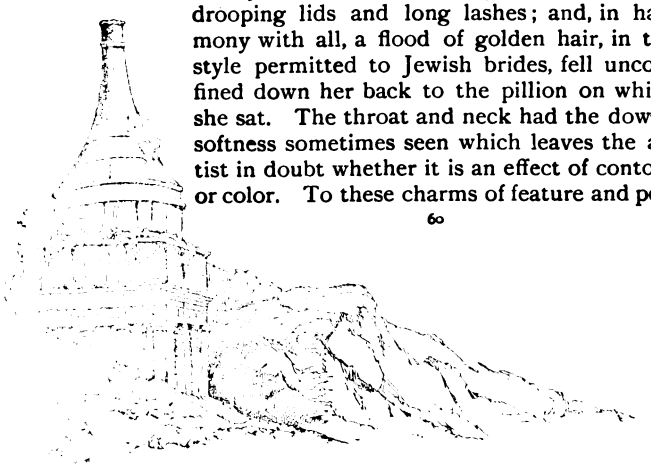
In another hour the party passed out the gate, and, turning to the left, took the road to Bethlehem. The descent into the valley of Hinnom was quite broken, garnished here and there with straggling wild olive-trees. Carefully, tenderly, the Nazarene walked by the woman's side, leading-strap in hand. On their left, reaching to the south and east round Mount Zion, rose the city wall, and on their right the steep prominences which form the western boundary of the valley.

Slowly they passed the Lower Pool of Gihon, out of which the sun was fast driving the lessening shadow of the royal hill; slowly they proceeded, keeping parallel with the aqueduct from the Pools of Solomon, until near the site of the country-house on what is now called the Hill of Evil Counsel; there they began to ascend to the plain of Rephaim. The sun streamed garishly over the stony face of the famous locality, and under its influence Mary, the daughter of Joachim, dropped the wimple entirely, and bared her head. Joseph told the story of the Philistines surprised in their camp there by David. He was tedious in the narrative, speaking with the solemn countenance and lifeless manner of a dull man. She did not always hear him.

Wherever on the land men go, and on the

sea ships, the face and figure of the Jew are familiar. The physical type of the race has always been the same; yet there have been some individual variations. "Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to." Such was the son of Jesse when brought before Samuel. The fancies of men have been ever since ruled by the description. Poetic license has extended the peculiarities of the ancestor to his notable descendants. So all our ideal Solomons have fair faces, and hair and beard chestnut in the shade, and of the tint of gold in the sun. Such, we are also made believe, were the locks of Absalom the beloved. And, in the absence of authentic history, tradition has dealt no less lovingly by her whom we are now following down to the native city of the ruddy king.

She was not more than fifteen. Her form, voice, and manner belonged to the period of transition from girlhood. Her face was perfectly oval, her complexion more pale than fair. The nose was faultless; the lips, slightly parted, were full and ripe, giving to the lines of the mouth warmth, tenderness, and trust; the eyes were blue and large, and shaded by drooping lids and long lashes; and, in harmony with all, a flood of golden hair, in the style permitted to Jewish brides, fell unconfined down her back to the pillion on which she sat. The throat and neck had the downy softness sometimes seen which leaves the artist in doubt whether it is an effect of contour or color. To these charms of feature and per-



son were added others more indefinable—an air of purity which only the soul can impart, and of abstraction natural to such as think much of things impalpable. Often, with trembling lips, she raised her eyes to heaven, itself not more deeply blue; often she crossed her hands upon her breast, as in adoration and prayer; often she raised her head like one listening eagerly for a calling voice. Now and then, midst his slow utterances, Joseph turned to look at her, and, catching the expression kindling her face as with light, forgot his theme, and with bowed head, wondering, plodded on.

So they skirted the great plain, and at length reached the elevation Mar Elias; from which, across a valley, they beheld Bethlehem, the old, old House of Bread, its white walls crowning a ridge, and shining above the brown scumbling of leafless orchards. They paused there, and rested, while Joseph pointed out the places of sacred renown; then they went down into the valley to the well which was the scene of one of the marvellous exploits of David's strong men. The narrow space was crowded with people and animals. A fear came upon Joseph —a fear lest, if the town were so thronged, there might not be house-room for the gentle Mary. Without delay, he hurried on, past the pillar of stone marking the tomb of Rachel, up the gardened slope, saluting none of the many persons he met on the way, until he stopped before the portal of the khan that then stood outside the village gates, near a junction of roads.

CHAPTER IX

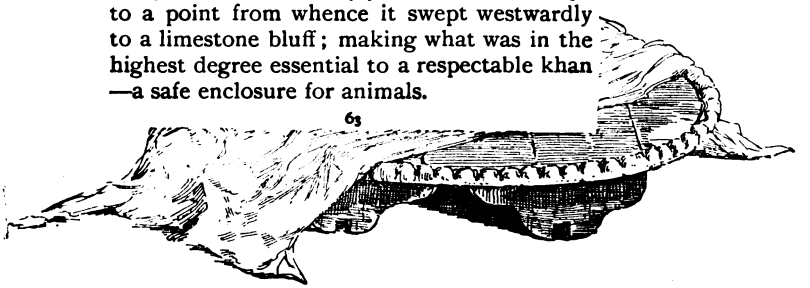
THE CAVE AT BETHLEHEM

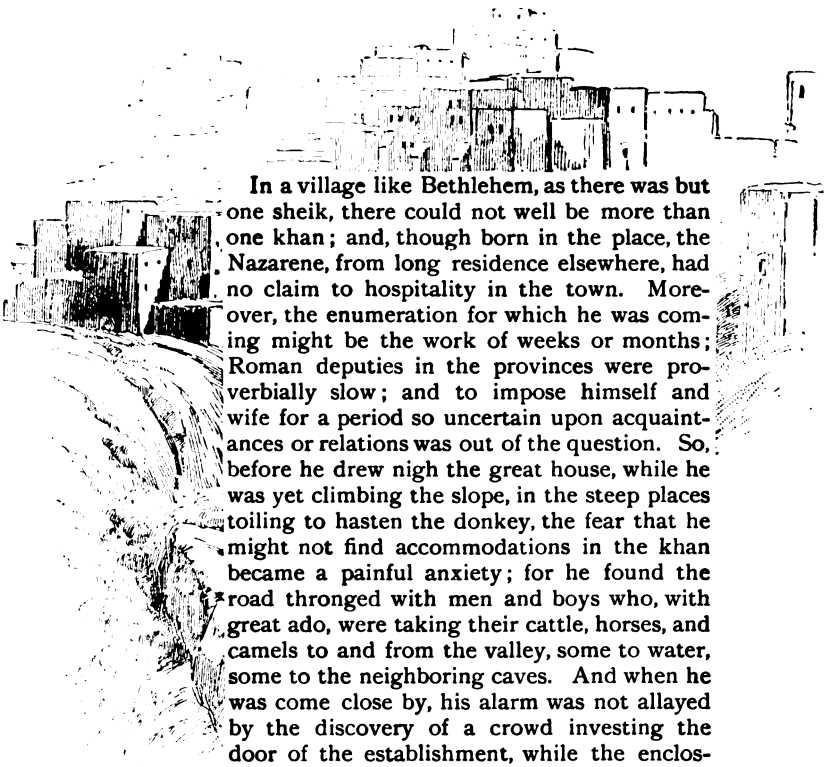
TO understand thoroughly what happened to the Nazarene at the khan, the reader must be reminded that Eastern inns were different from the inns of the Western world. They were called khans, from the Persian, and, in simplest form, were fenced enclosures, without house or shed, often without a gate or entrance. Their sites were chosen with reference to shade, defence, or water. Such were the inns that sheltered Jacob when he went to seek a wife in Padan-Aram. Their like may be seen at this day in the stopping-places of the desert. On the other hand, some of them, especially those on the roads between great cities, like Jerusalem and Alexandria, were princely establishments, monuments to the piety of the kings who built them. In ordinary, however, they were no more than the house or possession of a sheik, in which, as in headquarters, he swayed his tribe. Lodging the traveller was the least of their uses; they were markets, factories, forts; places of assemblage and residence for merchants and artisans quite as much as places of shelter for belated and wandering wayfarers. Within their walls, all the year round, occurred the multiplied daily transactions of a town.

The singular management of these hostelries

was the feature likely to strike a Western mind with most force. There was no host or hostess; no clerk, cook, or kitchen; a steward at the gate was all the assertion of government or proprietorship anywhere visible. Strangers arriving stayed at will without rendering account. A consequence of the system was that whoever came had to bring his food and culinary outfit with him, or buy them of dealers in the khan. The same rule held good as to his bed and bedding, and forage for his beasts. Water, rest, shelter, and protection were all he looked for from the proprietor, and they were gratuities. The peace of synagogues was sometimes broken by brawling disputants, but that of the khans never. The houses and all their appurtenances were sacred: a well was not more so.

The khan at Bethlehem, before which Joseph and his wife stopped, was a good specimen of its class, being neither very primitive nor very princely. The building was purely Oriental; that is to say, a quadrangular block of rough stones, one story high, flat-roofed, externally unbroken by a window, and with but one principal entrance—a doorway, which was also a gateway, on the eastern side, or front. The road ran by the door so near that the chalk dust half covered the lintel. A fence of flat rocks, beginning at the north-eastern corner of the pile, extended many yards down the slope to a point from whence it swept westwardly to a limestone bluff; making what was in the highest degree essential to a respectable khan —a safe enclosure for animals.





In a village like Bethlehem, as there was but one sheik, there could not well be more than one khan; and, though born in the place, the Nazarene, from long residence elsewhere, had no claim to hospitality in the town. Moreover, the enumeration for which he was coming might be the work of weeks or months; Roman deputies in the provinces were proverbially slow; and to impose himself and wife for a period so uncertain upon acquaintances or relations was out of the question. So, before he drew nigh the great house, while he was yet climbing the slope, in the steep places toiling to hasten the donkey, the fear that he might not find accommodations in the khan became a painful anxiety; for he found the road thronged with men and boys who, with great ado, were taking their cattle, horses, and camels to and from the valley, some to water, some to the neighboring caves. And when he was come close by, his alarm was not allayed by the discovery of a crowd investing the door of the establishment, while the enclosure adjoining, broad as it was, seemed already full.

"We cannot reach the door," Joseph said, in his slow way. "Let us stop here, and learn, if we can, what has happened."

The wife, without answering, quietly drew the wimple aside. The look of fatigue at first upon her face changed to one of interest. She found herself at the edge of an assemblage that could not be other than a matter of curiosity to her, although it was common enough

THE VIRGIN AND CHILD, ENTHRONED, WITH SAINTS

(The Colonna Raphael, painted in 1505 for a convent in Perugia)

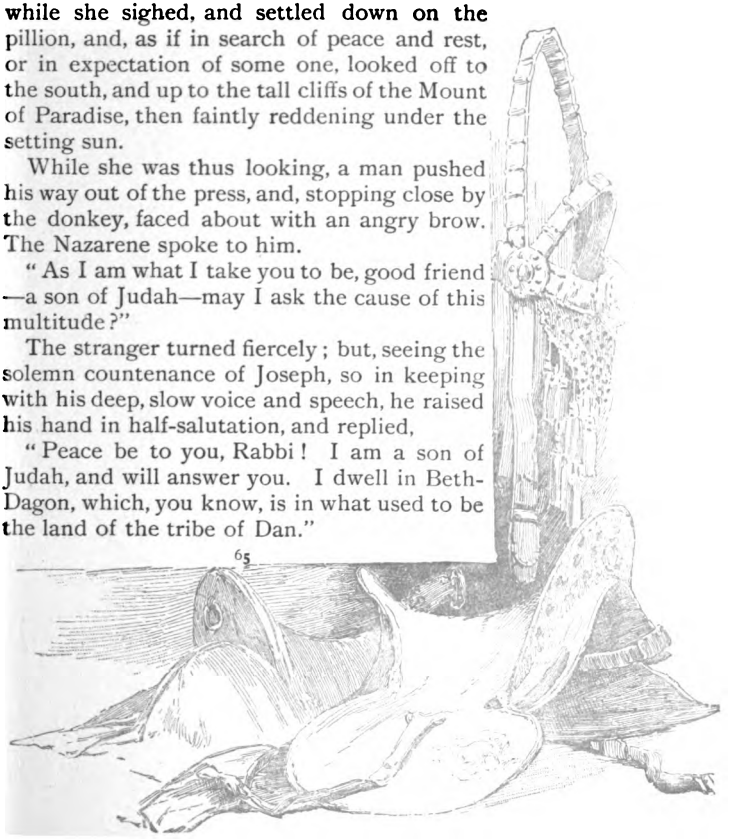
at the khans on any of the highways which the great caravans were accustomed to traverse. There were men on foot, running hither and thither, talking shrilly and in all the tongues of Syria; men on horseback screaming to men on camels; men struggling doubtfully with fractious cows and frightened sheep; men peddling bread and wine; and among the mass a herd of boys apparently in chase of a herd of dogs. Everybody and everything seemed to be in motion at the same time. Possibly the fair spectator was too weary to be long attracted by the scene; in a little while she sighed, and settled down on the pillion, and, as if in search of peace and rest, or in expectation of some one, looked off to the south, and up to the tall cliffs of the Mount of Paradise, then faintly reddening under the setting sun.

While she was thus looking, a man pushed his way out of the press, and, stopping close by the donkey, faced about with an angry brow. The Nazarene spoke to him.

"As I am what I take you to be, good friend —a son of Judah—may I ask the cause of this multitude?"

The stranger turned fiercely; but, seeing the solemn countenance of Joseph, so in keeping with his deep, slow voice and speech, he raised his hand in half-salutation, and replied,

"Peace be to you, Rabbi! I am a son of Judah, and will answer you. I dwell in Beth-Dagon, which, you know, is in what used to be the land of the tribe of Dan."



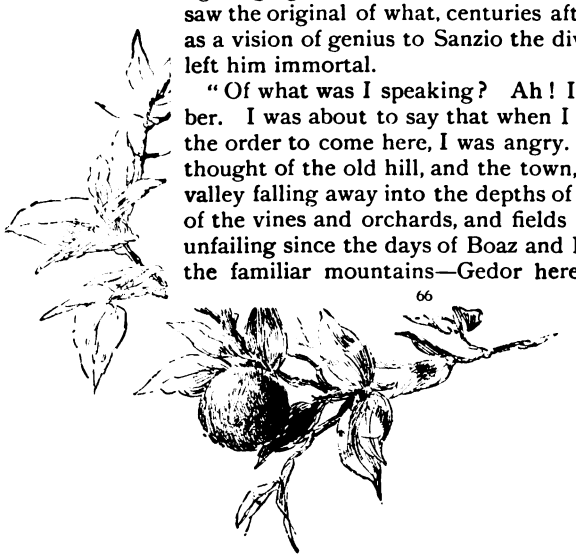
"On the road to Joppa from Modin," said Joseph.

"Ah, you nave been in Beth-Dagon," the man said, his face softening yet more. "What wanderers we of Judah are! I have been away from the ridge—old Ephrath, as our father Jacob called it—for many years. When the proclamation went abroad requiring all Hebrews to be numbered at the cities of their birth— That is my business here, Rabbi."

Joseph's face remained stolid as a mask, while he remarked, "I have come for that also —I and my wife."

The stranger glanced at Mary and kept silence. She was looking up at the bald top of Gedor. The sun touched her upturned face, and filled the violet depths of her eyes; and upon her parted lips trembled an aspiration which could not have been to a mortal. For the moment, all the humanity of her beauty seemed refined away: she was as we fancy they are who sit close by the gate in the transfiguring light of Heaven. The Beth-Dagonite saw the original of what, centuries after, came as a vision of genius to Sanzio the divine, and left him immortal.

"Of what was I speaking? Ah! I remember. I was about to say that when I heard of the order to come here, I was angry. Then I thought of the old hill, and the town, and the valley falling away into the depths of Cedron; of the vines and orchards, and fields of grain, unfailing since the days of Boaz and Ruth; of the familiar mountains—Gedor here, Gibeah



yonder, Mar Elias there—which, when I was a boy, were the walls of the world to me; and I forgave the tyrants and came—I, and Rachel, my wife, and Deborah and Michal, our roses of Sharon."

The man paused again, looking abruptly at Mary, who was now looking at him and listening. Then he said, "Rabbi, will not your wife go to mine? You may see her yonder with the children, under the leaning olive-tree at the bend of the road. I tell you"—he turned to Joseph and spoke positively—"I tell you the khan is full. It is useless to ask at the gate."

Joseph's will was slow, like his mind; he hesitated, but at length replied, "The offer is kind. Whether there be room for us or not in the house, we will go see your people. Let me speak to the gate-keeper myself. I will return quickly."

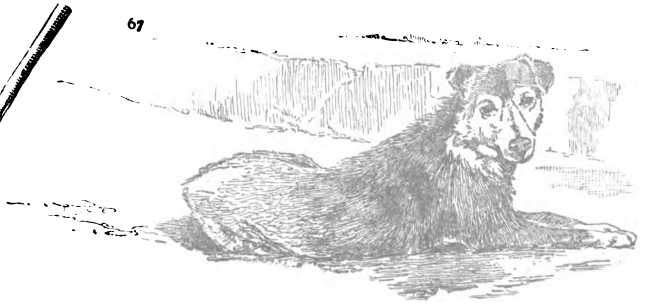
And, putting the leading-strap in the stranger's hand, he pushed into the stirring crowd.

The keeper sat on a great cedar block outside the gate. Against the wall behind him leaned a javelin. A dog squatted on the block by his side.

"The peace of Jehovah be with you," said Joseph, at last confronting the keeper.

"What you give, may you find again; and, when found, be it many times multiplied to you and yours," returned the watchman, gravely, though without moving.

"I am a Bethlehemite," said Joseph, in his most deliberate way. "Is there not room for—"

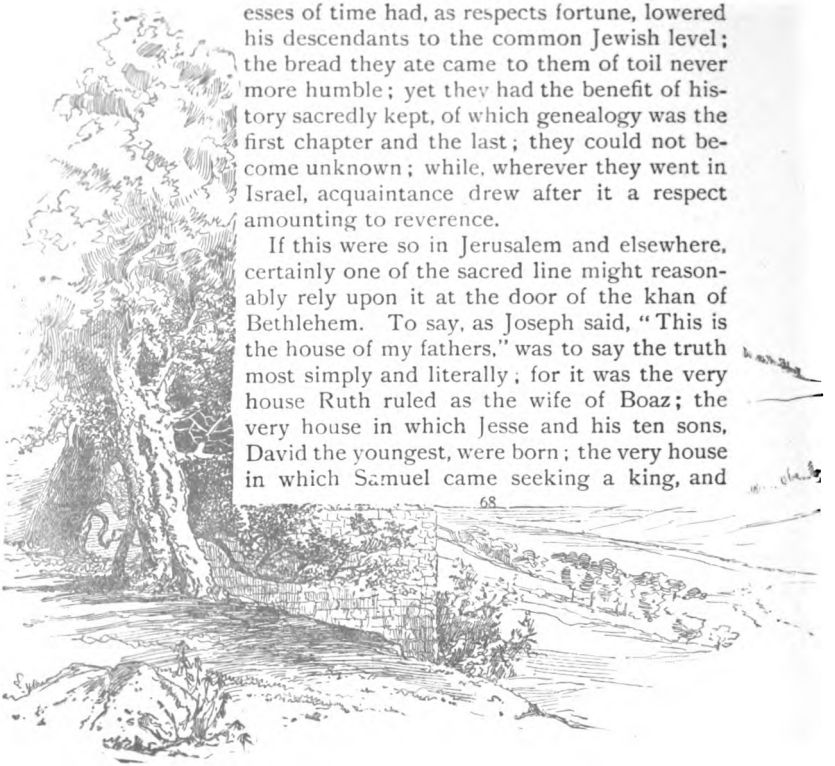


"There is not."

"You may have heard of me—Joseph of Nazareth. This is the house of my fathers. I am of the line of David."

These words held the Nazarene's hope. If they failed him, further appeal was idle, even that of the offer of many shekels. To be a son of Judah was one thing—in the tribal opinion a great thing; to be of the house of David was yet another; on the tongue of a Hebrew there could be no higher boast. A thousand years and more had passed since the boyish shepherd became the successor of Saul and founded a royal family. Wars, calamities, other kings, and the countless obscuring processes of time had, as respects fortune, lowered his descendants to the common Jewish level; the bread they ate came to them of toil never more humble; yet they had the benefit of history sacredly kept, of which genealogy was the first chapter and the last; they could not become unknown; while, wherever they went in Israel, acquaintance drew after it a respect amounting to reverence.

If this were so in Jerusalem and elsewhere, certainly one of the sacred line might reasonably rely upon it at the door of the khan of Bethlehem. To say, as Joseph said, "This is the house of my fathers," was to say the truth most simply and literally; for it was the very house Ruth ruled as the wife of Boaz; the very house in which Jesse and his ten sons, David the youngest, were born; the very house in which Samuel came seeking a king, and



found him; the very house which David gave to the son of Barzillai, the friendly Gileadite; the very house in which Jeremiah, by prayer, rescued the remnant of his race flying before the Babylonians.

The appeal was not without effect. The keeper of the gate slid down from the cedar block, and, laying his hand upon his beard, said, respectfully, "Rabbi, I cannot tell you when this door first opened in welcome to the traveller, but it was more than a thousand years ago; and in all that time there is no known instance of a good man turned away, save when there was no room to rest him in. If it has been so with the stranger, just cause must the steward have who says no to one of the line of David. Wherefore, I salute you again; and, if you care to go with me, I will show you that there is not a lodging-place left in the house; neither in the chambers, nor in the lewens, nor in the court—not even on the roof. May I ask when you came?"

"But now."

The keeper smiled.

"'The stranger that dwelleth with you shall be as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself.' Is not that the law, Rabbi?"

Joseph was silent.

"If it be the law, can I say to one a long time come, 'Go thy way; another is here to take thy place?'"

Yet Joseph held his peace.

"And, if I said so, to whom would the place

belong? See the many that have been waiting, some of them since noon."

"Who are all these people?" asked Joseph, turning to the crowd. "And why are they here at this time?"

"That which doubtless brought you, Rabbi —the decree of the Cæsar"—the keeper threw an interrogative glance at the Nazarene, then continued—"brought most of those who have lodging in the house. And yesterday the caravan passing from Damascus to Arabia and Lower Egypt arrived. These you see here belong to it—men and camels."

Still Joseph persisted.

"The court is large," he said.

"Yes, but it is heaped with cargoes—with bales of silk, and pockets of spices, and goods of every kind."

Then for a moment the face of the applicant lost its stolidity; the lustreless, staring eyes dropped. With some warmth he next said, "I do not care for myself, but I have with me my wife, and the night is cold—colder on these heights than in Nazareth. She cannot live in the open air. Is there not room in the town?"

"These people"—the keeper waved his hand to the throng before the door—"have all besought the town, and they report its accommodations all engaged."

Again Joseph studied the ground, saying, half to himself, "She is so young! if I make her bed on the hill, the frosts will kill her."

Then he spoke to the keeper again.

"It may be you knew her parents, Joachim and Anna, once of Bethlehem, and, like myself, of the line of David."

"Yes, I knew them. They were good people. That was in my youth."

This time the keeper's eyes sought the ground in thought. Suddenly he raised his head.

"If I cannot make room for you," he said, "I cannot turn you away. Rabbi, I will do the best I can for you. How many are of your party?"

Joseph reflected, then replied, "My wife and a friend with his family, from Beth-Dagon, a little town over by Joppa; in all, six of us."

"Very well. You shall not lie out on the ridge. Bring your people, and hasten; for, when the sun goes down behind the mountain, you know the night comes quickly, and it is nearly there now."

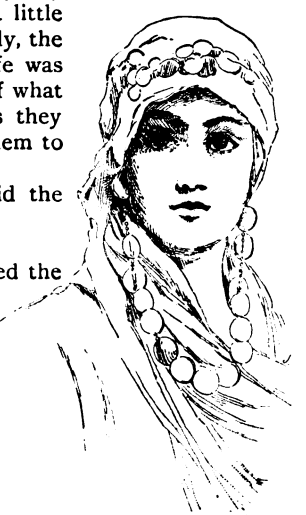
"I give you the blessing of the houseless traveller; that of the sojourner will follow."

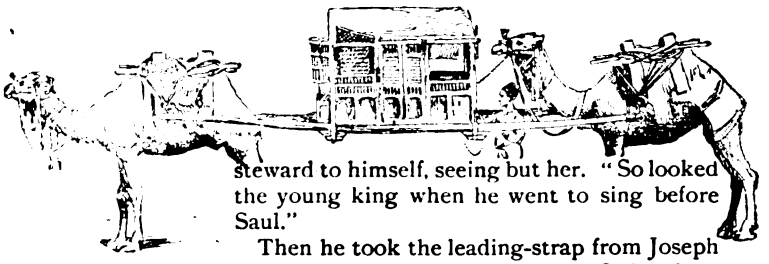
So saying, the Nazarene went back joyfully to Mary and the Beth-Dagonite. In a little while the latter brought up his family, the women mounted on donkeys. The wife was matronly, the daughters were images of what she must have been in youth; and as they drew nigh the door, the keeper knew them to be of the humble class.

"This is she of whom I spoke," said the Nazarene; "and these are our friends."

Mary's veil was raised.

"Blue eyes and hair of gold," muttered the





steward to himself, seeing but her. "So looked the young king when he went to sing before Saul."

Then he took the leading-strap from Joseph and said to Mary, "Peace to you, O daughter of David!" Then to the others, "Peace to you all!" Then to Joseph, "Rabbi, follow me."

The party were conducted into a wide passage paved with stone, from which they entered the court of the khan. To a stranger the scene would have been curious; but they noticed the lewens that yawned darkly upon them from all sides, and the court itself, only to remark how crowded they were. By a lane reserved in the stowage of the cargoes, and thence by a passage similar to the one at the entrance, they emerged into the enclosure adjoining the house, and came upon camels, horses, and donkeys, tethered and dozing in close groups; among them were the keepers, men of many lands; and they, too, slept or kept silent watch. They went down the slope of the crowded yard slowly, for the dull carriers of the women had wills of their own. At length they turned into a path running towards the gray limestone bluff overlooking the khan on the west.

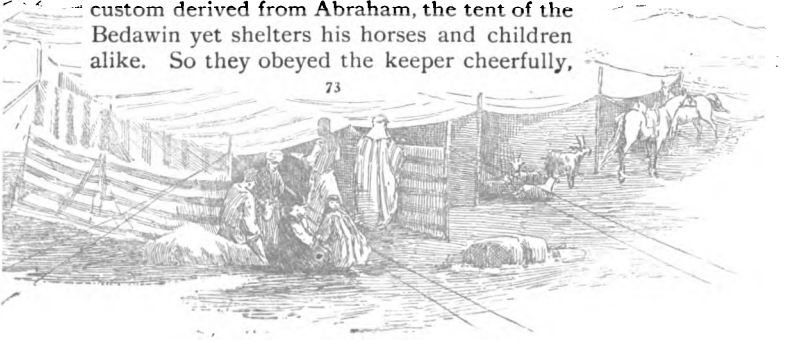
"We are going to the cave," said Joseph, laconically.

The guide lingered till Mary came to his side.

"The cave to which we are going," he said to her, "must have been a resort of your ancestor David. From the field below us, and

from the well down in the valley, he used to drive his flocks to it for safety; and afterwards, when he was king, he came back to the old house here for rest and health, bringing great trains of animals. The mangers yet remain as they were in his day. Better a bed upon the floor where he has slept than one in the court-yard or out by the road-side. Ah, here is the house before the cave!"

This speech must not be taken as an apology for the lodging offered. There was no need of apology. The place was the best then at disposal. The guests were simple folks, by habits of life easily satisfied. To the Jew of that period, moreover, abode in caverns was a familiar idea, made so by every-day occurrences, and by what he heard of Sabbaths in the synagogues. How much of Jewish history, how many of the most exciting incidents in that history, had transpired in caves! Yet further, these people were Jews of Bethlehem, with whom the idea was especially commonplace; for their locality abounded with caves great and small, some of which had been dwelling-places from the time of the Emim and Horites. No more was there offence to them in the fact that the cavern to which they were being taken had been, or was, a stable. They were the descendants of a race of herdsmen, whose flocks habitually shared both their habitations and wanderings. In keeping with a custom derived from Abraham, the tent of the Bedawin yet shelters his horses and children alike. So they obeyed the keeper cheerfully,



and gazed at the house, feeling only a natural curiosity. Everything associated with the history of David was interesting to them.

The building was low and narrow, projecting but a little from the rock to which it was joined at the rear, and wholly without a window. In its blank front there was a door, swung on enormous hinges, and thickly daubed with ochreous clay. While the wooden bolt of the lock was being pushed back, the women were assisted from their pillions. Upon the opening of the door, the keeper called out,

"Come in!"

The guests entered, and stared about them. It became apparent immediately that the house was but a mask or covering for the mouth of a natural cave or grotto, probably forty feet long, nine or ten high, and twelve or fifteen in width. The light streamed through the doorway, over an uneven floor, falling upon piles of grain and fodder, and earthen-ware and household property, occupying the centre of the chamber. Along the sides were mangers, low enough for sheep, and built of stones laid in cement. There were no stalls or partitions of any kind. Dust and chaff yellowed the floor, filled all the crevices and hollows, and thickened the spider-webs, which dropped from the ceiling like bits of dirty linen; otherwise the place was cleanly, and, to appearance, as comfortable as any of the arched lewens of the khan proper. In fact, a cave was the model and first suggestion of the lewen.

"Come in!" said the guide. "These piles

upon the floor are for travellers like yourselves. Take what of them you need."

Then he spoke to Mary.

"Can you rest here?"

"The place is sanctified," she answered.

"I leave you then. Peace be with you all!"

When he was gone, they busied themselves making the cave habitable.

CHAPTER X

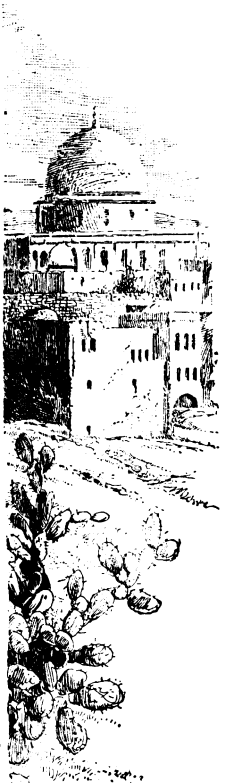
THE LIGHT IN THE SKY

AT a certain hour in the evening the shouting and stir of the people in and about the khan ceased; at the same time, every Israelite, if not already upon his feet, arose, solemnized his face, looked towards Jerusalem, crossed his hands upon his breast, and prayed; for it was the sacred ninth hour, when sacrifices were offered in the temple on Moriah, and God was supposed to be there. When the hands of the worshippers fell down, the commotion broke forth again; everybody hastened to bread, or to make his pallet. A little later, the lights were put out, and there was silence, and then sleep.

. . . . . .

About midnight some one on the roof cried out, "What light is that in the sky? Awake, brethren, awake and see!"

The people, half asleep, sat up and looked; then they became wide awake, though wonderstruck. And the stir spread to the court be-



low, and into the lewens; soon the entire ten antry of the house and court and enclosure were out gazing at the sky.

And this was what they saw: a ray of light, beginning at a height immeasurably beyond the nearest stars, and dropping obliquely to the earth; at its top, a diminishing point; at its base, many furlongs in width; its sides blending softly with the darkness of the night; its core a roseate electrical splendor. The apparition seemed to rest on the nearest mountain south-east of the town, making a pale corona along the line of the summit. The khan was touched luminously, so that those upon the roof saw each other's faces, all filled with wonder.

Steadily, through minutes, the ray lingered, and then the wonder changed to awe and fear; the timid trembled; the boldest spoke in whispers.

"Saw you ever the like?" asked one.

"It seems just over the mountain there. I cannot tell what it is, nor did I ever see anything like it," was the answer.

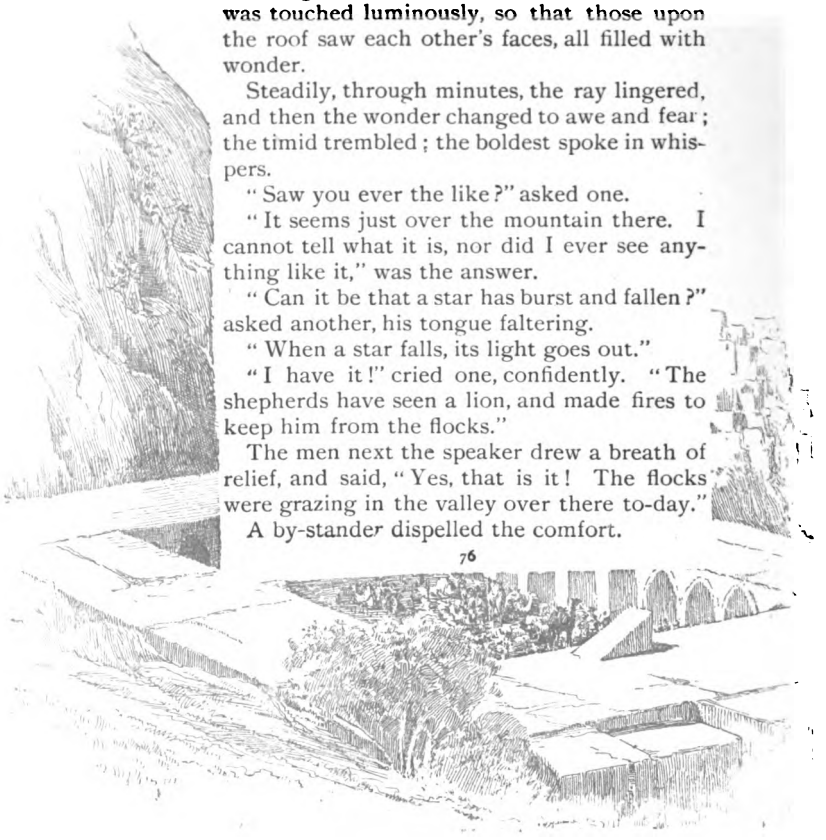
"Can it be that a star has burst and fallen?" asked another, his tongue faltering.

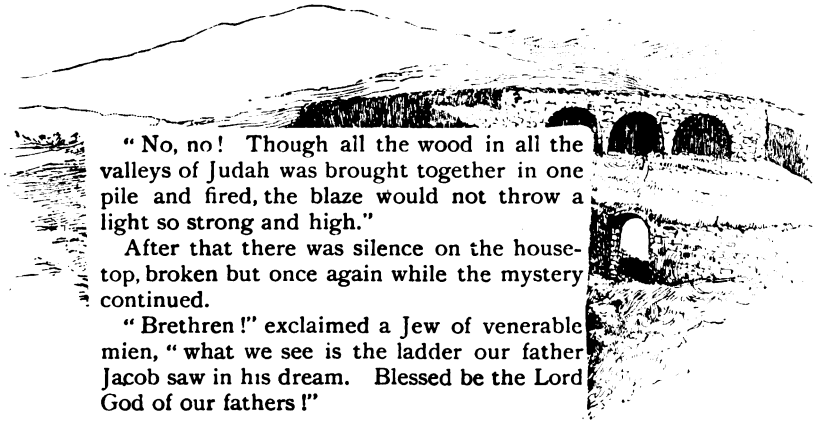
"When a star falls, its light goes out."

"I have it!" cried one, confidently. "The shepherds have seen a lion, and made fires to keep him from the flocks."

The men next the speaker drew a breath of relief, and said, "Yes, that is it! The flocks were grazing in the valley over there to-day."

A by-stander dispelled the comfort.





"No, no! Though all the wood in all the valleys of Judah was brought together in one pile and fired, the blaze would not throw a light so strong and high."

After that there was silence on the house-top, broken but once again while the mystery continued.

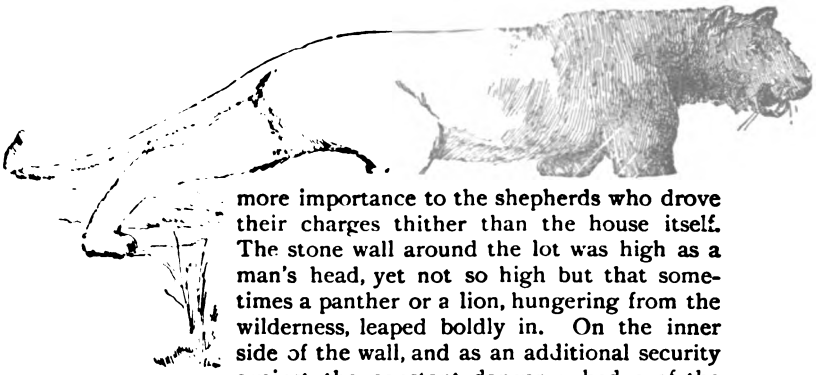
"Brethren!" exclaimed a Jew of venerable mien, "what we see is the ladder our father Jacob saw in his dream. Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers!"

CHAPTER XI

CHRIST IS BORN

A MILE and a half, it may be two miles, south-east of Bethlehem, there is a plain separated from the town by an intervening swell of the mountain. Besides being well sheltered from the north winds, the vale was covered with a growth of sycamore, dwarf-oak, and pine-trees, while in the glens and ravines adjoining there were thickets of olive and mulberry; all at this season of the year invaluable for the support of sheep, goats, and cattle, of which the wandering flocks consisted.

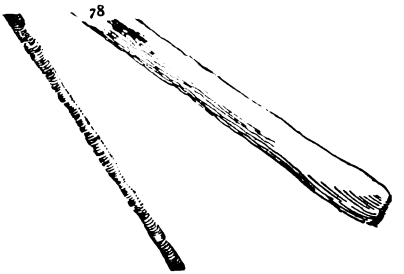
At the side farthest from the town, close under a bluff, there was an extensive mârâh, or sheepcot, ages old. In some long-forgotten foray, the building had been unroofed and almost demolished. The enclosure attached to it remained intact, however, and that was of



more importance to the shepherds who drove their charges thither than the house itself. The stone wall around the lot was high as a man's head, yet not so high but that sometimes a panther or a lion, hungering from the wilderness, leaped boldly in. On the inner side of the wall, and as an additional security against the constant danger, a hedge of the rhamnus had been planted, an invention so successful that now a sparrow could hardly penetrate the overtopping branches, armed as they were with great clusters of thorns hard as spikes.

The day of the occurrences which occupy the preceding chapters, a number of shepherds, seeking fresh walks for their flocks, led them up to this plain, and from early morning the groves had been made ring with calls, and the blows of axes, the bleating of sheep and goats, the tinkling of bells, the lowing of cattle, and the barking of dogs. When the sun went down, they led the way to the mârâh, and by nightfall had everything safe in the field; then they kindled a fire down by the gate, partook of their humble supper, and sat down to rest and talk, leaving one on watch.

There were six of these men, omitting the watchman; and afterwhile they assembled in a group near the fire, some sitting, some lying prone. As they went bareheaded habitually, their hair stood out in thick, coarse, sunburnt shocks; their beard covered their throats, and fell in mats down the breast; mantles of the skin of kids and lambs, with the fleece on,



wrapped them from neck to knee, leaving the arms exposed; broad belts girthed the rude garments to their waists; their sandals were of the coarsest quality; from their right shoulders hung scrips containing food and selected stones for slings, with which they were armed; on the ground near each one lay his crook, a symbol of his calling and a weapon of offence.

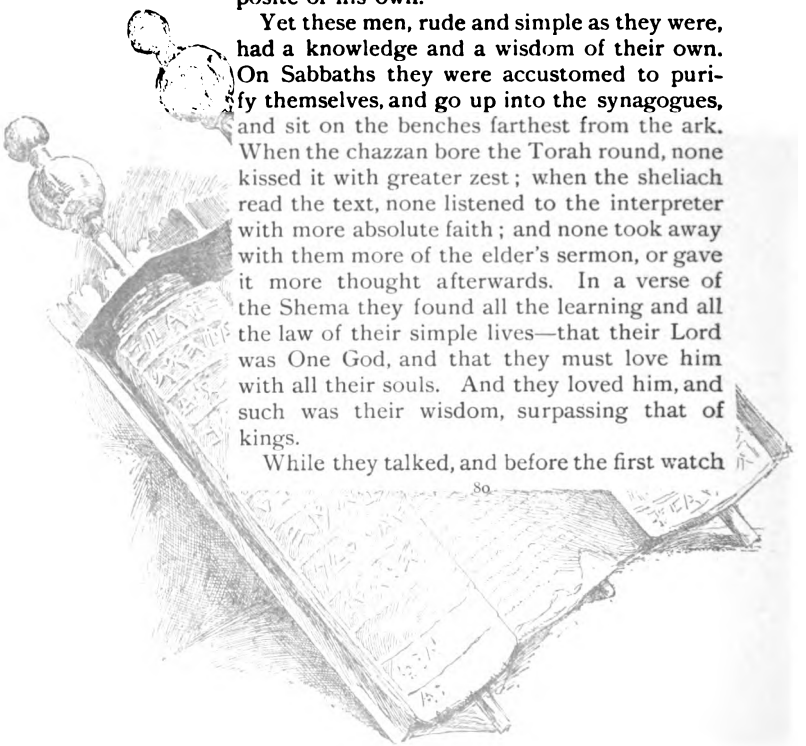
Such were the shepherds of Judea! In appearance, rough and savage as the gaunt dogs sitting with them around the blaze; in fact, simple-minded, tender-hearted: effects due, in part, to the primitive life they led, but chiefly to their constant care of things lovable and helpless.

They rested and talked; and their talk was all about their flocks, a dull theme to the world, yet a theme which was all the world to them. If in narrative they dwelt long upon affairs of trifling moment; if one of them omitted nothing of detail in recounting the loss of a lamb, the relation between him and the unfortunate should be remembered: at birth it became his charge, his to keep all its days, to help over the floods, to carry down the hollows, to name and train; it was to be his companion, his object of thought and interest, the subject of his will; it was to enliven and share his wanderings; in its defence he might be called on to face the lion or robber—to die.

The great events, such as blotted out nations and changed the mastery of the world, were trifles to them, if perchance they came to their knowledge. Of what Herod was do-

ing in this city or that, building palaces and gymnasia, and indulging forbidden practices, they occasionally heard. As was her habit in those days, Rome did not wait for people slow to inquire about her; she came to them. Over the hills along which he was leading his lagging herd, or in the fastnesses in which he was hiding them, not unfrequently the shepherd was startled by the blare of trumpets, and, peering out, beheld a cohort, sometimes a legion, in march; and when the glittering crests were gone, and the excitement incident to the intrusion over, he bent himself to evolve the meaning of the eagles and gilded globes of the soldiery, and the charm of a life so the opposite of his own.

Yet these men, rude and simple as they were, had a knowledge and a wisdom of their own. On Sabbaths they were accustomed to purify themselves, and go up into the synagogues, and sit on the benches farthest from the ark. When the chazzan bore the Torah round, none kissed it with greater zest; when the sheliach read the text, none listened to the interpreter with more absolute faith; and none took away with them more of the elder's sermon, or gave it more thought afterwards. In a verse of the Shema they found all the learning and all the law of their simple lives—that their Lord was One God, and that they must love him with all their souls. And they loved him, and such was their wisdom, surpassing that of kings.



While they talked, and before the first watch

was over, one by one the shepherds went to sleep, each lying where he had sat.

The night, like most nights of the winter season in the hill country, was clear, crisp, and sparkling with stars. There was no wind. The atmosphere seemed never so pure, and the stillness was more than silence; it was a holy hush, a warning that heaven was stooping low to whisper some good thing to the listening earth.

By the gate, hugging his mantle close, the watchman walked; at times he stopped, attracted by a stir among the sleeping herds, or by a jackal's cry off on the mountain-side. The midnight was slow coming to him; but at last it came. His task was done; now for the dreamless sleep with which labor blesses its wearied children! He moved towards the fire, but paused; a light was breaking around him, soft and white, like the moon's. He waited breathlessly. The light deepened; things before invisible came to view; he saw the whole field, and all it sheltered. A chill sharper than that of the frosty air—a chill of fear—smote him. He looked up; the stars were gone; the light was dropping as from a window in the sky; as he looked, it became a splendor; then, in terror, he cried,

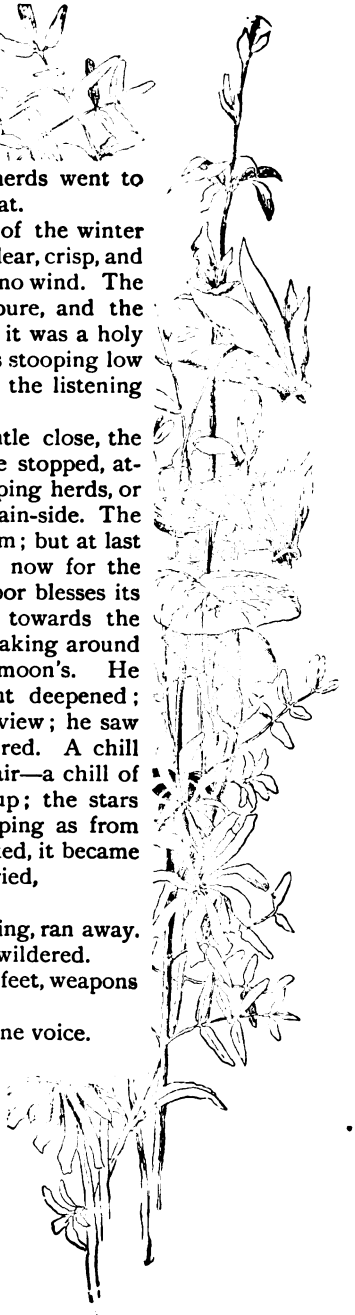
"Awake, awake!"

Up sprang the dogs, and, howling, ran away.

The herds rushed together bewildered.

The men clambered to their feet, weapons in hand.

"What is it?" they asked, in one voice.



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"See!" cried the watchman, "the sky is on fire!"

Suddenly the light became intolerably bright, and they covered their eyes, and dropped upon their knees; then, as their souls shrank with fear, they fell upon their faces blind and fainting, and would have died had not a voice said to them,

"Fear not!"

And they listened.

"Fear not: for behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."

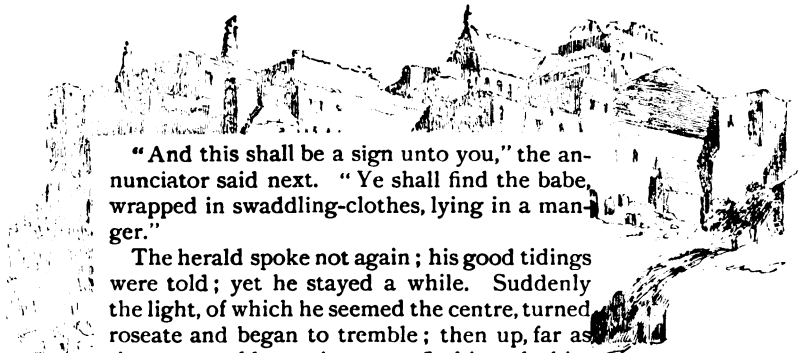
The voice, in sweetness and soothing more than human, and low and clear, penetrated all their being, and filled them with assurance. They rose upon their knees, and, looking worshipfully, beheld in the centre of a great glory the appearance of a man, clad in a robe intensely white; above its shoulders towered the tops of wings, shining and folded; a star over its forehead glowed with steady lustre, brilliant as Hesperus; its hands were stretched towards them in blessing; its face was serene and divinely beautiful.

They had often heard, and, in their simple way, talked, of angels; and they doubted not now, but said, in their hearts, The glory of God is about us, and this is he who of old came to the prophet by the river of Ulai.

Directly the angel continued:

"For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord!"

Again there was a rest, while the words sank into their minds.



"And this shall be a sign unto you," the annunciator said next. "Ye shall find the babe, wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger."

The herald spoke not again; his good tidings were told; yet he stayed a while. Suddenly the light, of which he seemed the centre, turned roseate and began to tremble; then up, far as the men could see, there was flashing of white wings, and coming and going of radiant forms, and voices as of a multitude chanting in unison,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men!"

Not once the praise, but many times.

Then the herald raised his eyes as seeking approval of one far off; his wings stirred, and spread slowly and majestically, on their upper side white as snow, in the shadow vari-tinted, like mother-of-pearl; when they were expanded many cubits beyond his stature, he arose lightly, and, without effort, floated out of view, taking the light up with him. Long after he was gone, down from the sky fell the refrain in measure mellowed by distance, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men!"

When the shepherds came fully to their senses, they stared at each other stupidly, until one of them said, "It was Gabriel, the Lord's messenger unto men."

None answered.

"Christ the Lord is born; said he not so?"

Then another recovered his voice, and replied, "That is what he said."

"And did he not also say, in the city of David, which is our Bethlehem yonder? And that we should find him a babe in swaddling-clothes?"

"And lying in a manger."

The first speaker gazed into the fire thoughtfully, but at length said, like one possessed of a sudden resolve, "There is but one place in Bethlehem where there are mangers; but one, and that is in the cave near the old khan. Brethren, let us go see this thing which has come to pass. The priests and doctors have been a long time looking for the Christ. Now he is born, and the Lord has given us a sign by which to know him. Let us go up and worship him."

"But the flocks!"

"The Lord will take care of them. Let us make haste." Then they all arose and left the mârâh.

. . . . . .

Around the mountain and through the town they passed, and came to the gate of the khan, where there was a man on watch.

"What would you have?" he asked.

"We have seen and heard great things to-night," they replied.

"Well, we, too, have seen great things, but heard nothing. What did you hear?"

"Let us go down to the cave in the enclosure, that we may be sure; then we will tell you all. Come with us, and see for yourself."

"It is a fool's errand."

"No, the Christ is born."

"The Christ! How do you know?"

"Let us go and see first."

The man laughed scornfully.

"The Christ indeed! How are you to know him?"

"He was born this night, and is now lying in a manger, so we were told; and there is but one place in Bethlehem with mangers."

"The cave?"

"Yes. Come with us."

They went through the court-yard without notice, although there were some up even then talking about the wonderful light. The door of the cavern was open. A lantern was burning within, and they entered unceremoniously.

"I give you peace," the watchman said to Joseph and the Beth-Dagonite. "Here are people looking for a child born this night, whom they are to know by finding him in swaddling-clothes and lying in a manger."

For a moment the face of the stolid Nazarene was moved; turning away, he said, "The child is here."

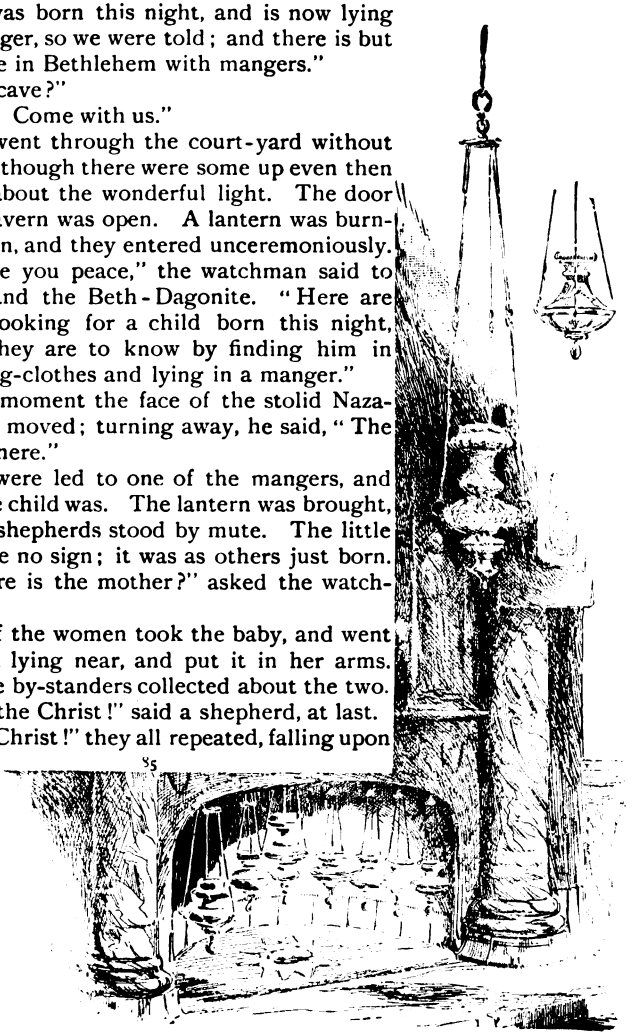
They were led to one of the mangers, and there the child was. The lantern was brought, and the shepherds stood by mute. The little one made no sign; it was as others just born.

"Where is the mother?" asked the watchman.

One of the women took the baby, and went to Mary, lying near, and put it in her arms. Then the by-standers collected about the two.

"It is the Christ!" said a shepherd, at last.

"The Christ!" they all repeated, falling upon



their knees in worship. One of them repeated several times over,

"It is the Lord, and his glory is above the earth and heaven."

And the simple men, never doubting, kissed the hem of the mother's robe, and with joyful faces departed. In the khan, to all the people aroused and pressing about them, they told their story; and through the town, and all the way back to the mârâh, they chanted the refrain of the angels, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men!"

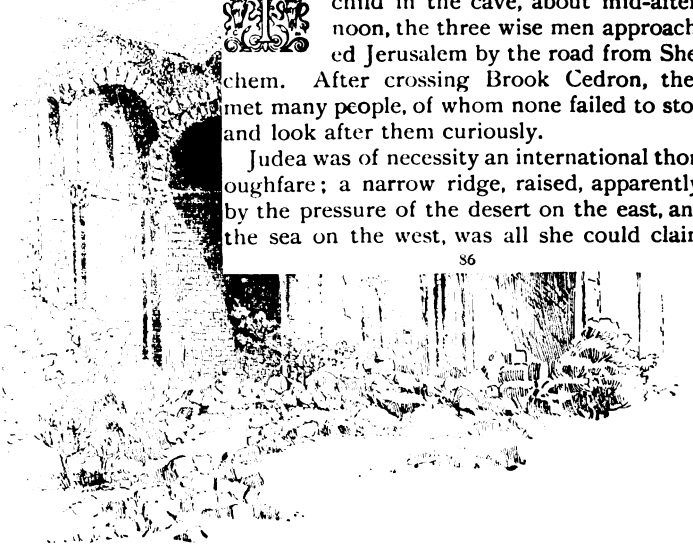
The story went abroad, confirmed by the light so generally seen; and the next day, and for days thereafter, the cave was visited by curious crowds, of whom some believed, though the greater part laughed and mocked.

CHAPTER XII

THE WISE MEN ARRIVE AT JERUSALEM

THE eleventh day after the birth of the child in the cave, about mid-afternoon, the three wise men approached Jerusalem by the road from Shechem. After crossing Brook Cedron, they met many people, of whom none failed to stop and look after them curiously.

Judea was of necessity an international thoroughfare; a narrow ridge, raised, apparently, by the pressure of the desert on the east, and the sea on the west, was all she could claim



to be; over the ridge, however, nature had stretched the line of trade between the east and the south; and that was her wealth. In other words, the riches of Jerusalem were the tolls she levied on passing commerce. Nowhere else, consequently, unless in Rome, was there such constant assemblage of so many people of so many different nations; in no other city was a stranger less strange to the residents than within her walls and purlieus. And yet these three men excited the wonder of all whom they met on the way to the gates.

A child belonging to some women sitting by the road-side opposite the Tombs of the Kings saw the party coming; immediately it clapped its hands, and cried, "Look, look! What pretty bells! What big camels!"

The bells were silver; the camels, as we have seen, were of unusual size and whiteness, and moved with singular stateliness; the trappings told of the desert and of long journeys thereon, and also of ample means in possession of the owners, who sat under the little canopies exactly as they appeared at the rendezvous beyond the Jebel. Yet it was not the bells or the camels, or their furniture, or the demeanor of the riders, that were so wonderful; it was the question put by the man who rode foremost of the three.

The approach to Jerusalem from the north is across a plain which dips southward, leaving the Damascus Gate in a vale or hollow. The road is narrow, but deeply cut by long use, and in places difficult on account of the cobbles

left loose and dry by the washing of the rains. On either side, however, there stretched, in the old time, rich fields and handsome olive-groves, which must, in luxurious growth, have been beautiful, especially to travellers fresh from the wastes of the desert. In this road the three stopped before the party in front of the Tombs.

"Good people," said Balthasar, stroking his plaited beard, and bending from his cot, "is not Jerusalem close by?"

"Yes," answered the woman into whose arms the child had shrunk. "If the trees on yon swell were a little lower you could see the towers on the market-place."

Balthasar gave the Greek and the Hindoo a look, then asked,

"Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"

The women gazed at each other without reply.

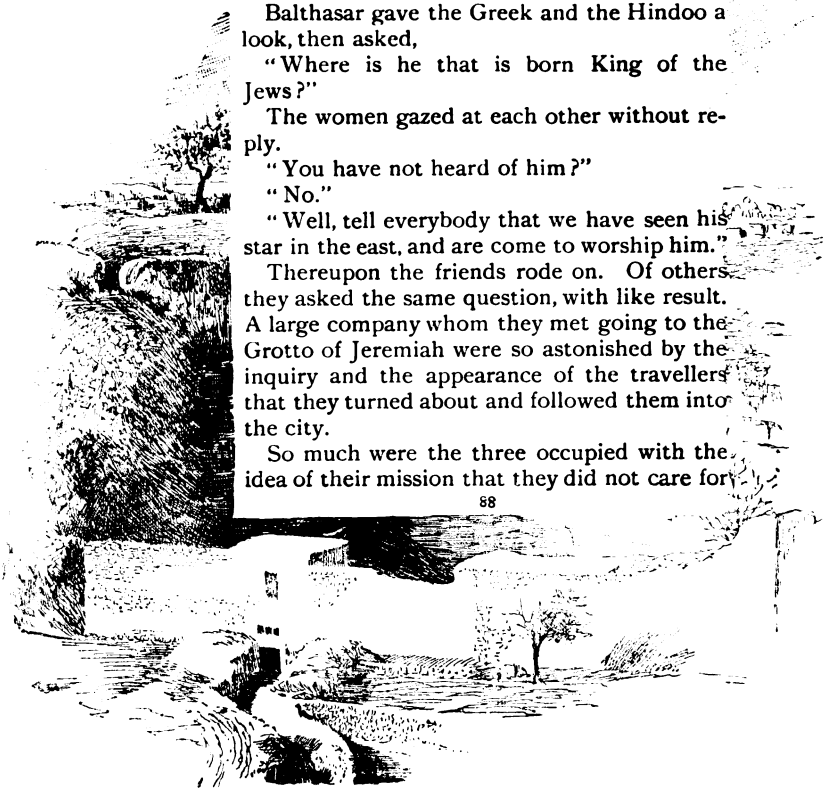
"You have not heard of him?"

"No."

"Well, tell everybody that we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

Thereupon the friends rode on. Of others they asked the same question, with like result. A large company whom they met going to the Grotto of Jeremiah were so astonished by the inquiry and the appearance of the travellers that they turned about and followed them into the city.

So much were the three occupied with the idea of their mission that they did not care for



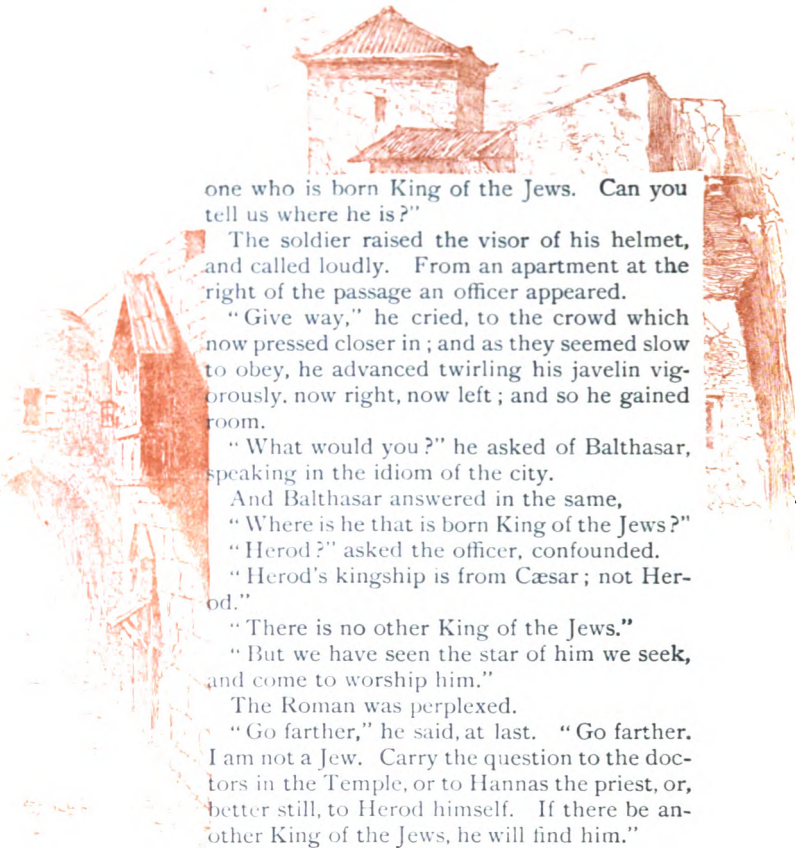
the view which presently rose before them in the utmost magnificence: for the village first to receive them on Bezetha; for Mizpah and Olivet, over on their left; for the wall behind the village, with its forty tall and solid towers, superadded partly for strength, partly to gratify the critical taste of the kingly builder; for the same towered wall bending off to the right, with many an angle, and here and there an embattled gate, up to the three great white piles Phasælus, Mariamne, and Hippicus; for Zion, tallest of the hills, crowned with marble palaces, and never so beautiful; for the glittering terraces of the temple on Moriah, admittedly one of the wonders of the earth; for the regal mountains rimming the sacred city round about until it seemed in the hollow of a mighty bowl.

They came, at length, to a tower of great height and strength, overlooking the gate which, at that time, answered to the present Damascus Gate, and marked the meeting-place of the three roads from Shechem, Jericho, and Gibeon. A Roman guard kept the passage-way. By this time the people following the camels formed a train sufficient to draw the idlers hanging about the portal; so that when Balthasar stopped to speak to the sentinel, the three became instantly the centre of a close circle eager to hear all that passed.

"I give you peace," the Egyptian said, in a clear voice.

The sentinel made no reply.

"We have come great distances in search of



one who is born King of the Jews. Can you tell us where he is?"

The soldier raised the visor of his helmet, and called loudly. From an apartment at the right of the passage an officer appeared.

"Give way," he cried, to the crowd which now pressed closer in; and as they seemed slow to obey, he advanced twirling his javelin vigorously, now right, now left; and so he gained room.

"What would you?" he asked of Balthasar, speaking in the idiom of the city.

And Balthasar answered in the same,

"Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"

"Herod?" asked the officer, confounded.

"Herod's kingship is from Cæsar; not Herod."

"There is no other King of the Jews."

"But we have seen the star of him we seek, and come to worship him."

The Roman was perplexed.

"Go farther," he said, at last. "Go farther. I am not a Jew. Carry the question to the doctors in the Temple, or to Hannas the priest, or, better still, to Herod himself. If there be another King of the Jews, he will find him."

Thereupon he made way for the strangers, and they passed the gate. But, before entering the narrow street, Balthasar lingered to say to his friends, "We are sufficiently proclaimed. By midnight the whole city will have heard of us and of our mission. Let us to the khan now."

CHAPTER XIII

THE WITNESSES BEFORE HEROD

THAT evening, before sunset, some women were washing clothes on the upper step of the flight that led down into the basin of the Pool of Siloam. They knelt each before a broad bowl of earthen-ware. A girl at the foot of the steps kept them supplied with water, and sang while she filled the jar. The song was cheerful, and no doubt lightened their labor. Occasionally they would sit upon their heels, and look up the slope of Ophel, and round to the summit of what is now the Mount of Offence, then faintly glorified by the dying sun.

While they plied their hands, rubbing and wringing the clothes in the bowls, two other women came to them, each with an empty jar upon her shoulder.

"Peace to you," one of the new-comers said.

The laborers paused, sat up, wrung the water from their hands, and returned the salutation.

"It is nearly night—time to quit."

"There is no end to work," was the reply.

"But there is a time to rest, and—"

"To hear what may be passing," interposed another.

"What news have you?"

"Then you have not heard?"

"No."

"They say the Christ is born," said the newsmonger, plunging into her story.

It was curious to see the faces of the laborers brighten with interest; on the other side down came the jars, which, in a moment, were turned into seats for their owners.

"The Christ!" the listeners cried.

"So they say."

"Who?"

"Everybody; it is common talk."

"Does anybody believe it?"

"This afternoon three men came across Brook Cedron on the road from Shechem," the speaker replied, circumstantially, intending to smother doubt. "Each one of them rode a camel spotless white, and larger than any ever before seen in Jerusalem."

The eyes and mouths of the auditors opened wide.

"To prove how great and rich the men were," the narrator continued, "they sat under awnings of silk; the buckles of their saddles were of gold, as was the fringe of their bridles; the bells were of silver, and made real music. Nobody knew them; they looked as if they had come from the ends of the world. Only one of them spoke, and of everybody on the road, even the women and children, he asked this question—'Where is he that is born King of the Jews?' No one gave them answer—no one understood what they meant; so they passed on, leaving behind them this saying: 'For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.' They put the question

to the Roman at the gate; and he, no wiser than the simple people on the road, sent them up to Herod."

"Where are they now?"

"At the khan. Hundreds have been to look at them already, and hundreds more are going."

"Who are they?"

"Nobody knows. They are said to be Persians — wise men who talk with the stars — prophets, it may be, like Elijah and Jeremiah."

"What do they mean by King of the Jews?"

"The Christ, and that he is just born."

One of the women laughed, and resumed her work, saying, "Well, when I see him I will believe."

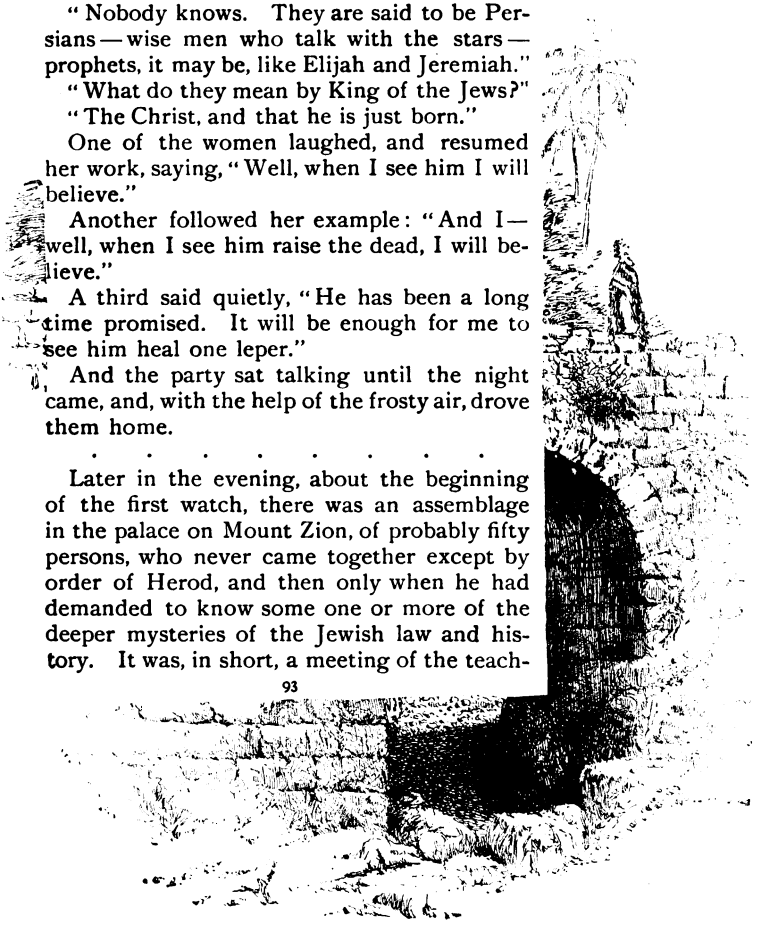
Another followed her example: "And I — well, when I see him raise the dead, I will believe."

A third said quietly, "He has been a long time promised. It will be enough for me to see him heal one leper."

And the party sat talking until the night came, and, with the help of the frosty air, drove them home.

. . . . . .

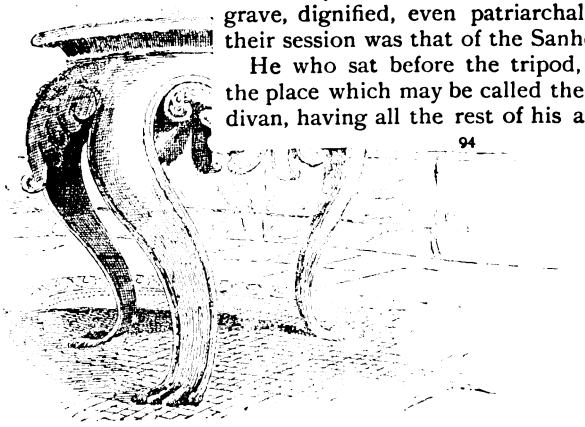
Later in the evening, about the beginning of the first watch, there was an assemblage in the palace on Mount Zion, of probably fifty persons, who never came together except by order of Herod, and then only when he had demanded to know some one or more of the deeper mysteries of the Jewish law and history. It was, in short, a meeting of the teach-



ers of the colleges, of the chief priests, and of the doctors most noted in the city for learning —the leaders of opinion, expounders of the different creeds; princes of the Sadducees; Pharisaic debaters; calm, soft-spoken, stoical philosophers of the Essene socialists.

The chamber in which the session was held belonged to one of the interior court-yards of the palace, and was quite large and Romanesque. The floor was tessellated with marble blocks; the walls, unbroken by a window, were frescoed in panels of saffron-yellow; a divan occupied the centre of the apartment, covered with cushions of bright-yellow cloth, and fashioned in form of the letter U, the opening towards the door-way; in the arch of the divan, or, as it were, in the bend of the letter, there was an immense bronze tripod, curiously inlaid with gold and silver, over which a chandelier dropped from the ceiling, having seven arms, each holding a lighted lamp. The divan and the lamp were purely Jewish.

The company sat upon the divan after the style of Orientals, in costume singularly uniform, except as to color. They were mostly men advanced in years; immense beards covered their faces; to their large noses were added the effects of large black eyes, deeply shaded by bold brows; their demeanor was grave, dignified, even patriarchal. In brief, their session was that of the Sanhedrim.



He who sat before the tripod, however, in the place which may be called the head of the divan, having all the rest of his associates on

his right and left, and, at the same time, before him, evidently president of the meeting, would have instantly absorbed the attention of a spectator. He had been cast in large mould, but was now shrunken and stooped to ghastliness; his white robe dropped from his shoulders in folds that gave no hint of muscle or anything but an angular skeleton. His hands, half-concealed by sleeves of silk, white and crimson striped, were clasped upon his knees. When he spoke, sometimes the first finger of the right hand extended tremulously; he seemed incapable of other gesture. But his head was a splendid dome. A few hairs, whiter than fine-drawn silver, fringed the base; over a broad, full-sphered skull the skin was drawn close, and shone in the light with positive brilliance; the temples were deep hollows, from which the forehead beetled like a wrinkled crag; the eyes were wan and dim; the nose was pinched; and all the lower face was muffled in a beard flowing and venerable as Aaron's. Such was Hillel the Babylonian! The line of prophets, long extinct in Israel, was now succeeded by a line of scholars, of whom he was first in learning—a prophet in all but the divine inspiration! At the age of one hundred and six, he was still Rector of the Great College.

On the table before him lay out-spread a roll or volume of parchment inscribed with Hebrew characters; behind him, in waiting, stood a page richly habited.

There had been discussion, but at this mo-

ment of introduction the company had reached a conclusion; each one was in an attitude of rest, and the venerable Hillel, without moving, called the page.

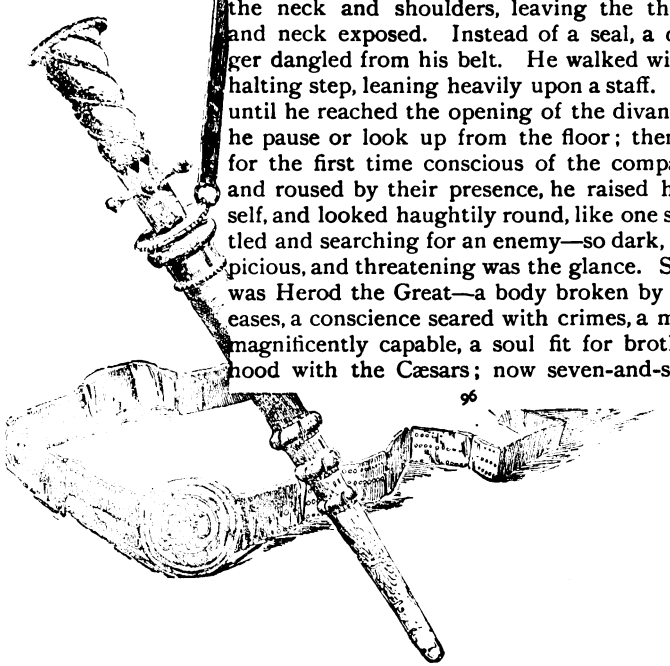
"Hist!"

The youth advanced respectfully.

"Go tell the king we are ready to give him answer."

The boy hurried away.

After a time two officers entered and stopped, one on each side the door; after them slowly followed a most striking personage—an old man clad in a purple robe bordered with scarlet, and girt to his waist by a band of gold linked so fine that it was pliable as leather; the latchets of his shoes sparkled with precious stones; a narrow crown wrought in filigree shone outside a tarbooshe of softest crimson plush, which, encasing his head, fell down the neck and shoulders, leaving the throat and neck exposed. Instead of a seal, a dagger dangled from his belt. He walked with a halting step, leaning heavily upon a staff. Not until he reached the opening of the divan did he pause or look up from the floor; then, as for the first time conscious of the company, and roused by their presence, he raised himself, and looked haughtily round, like one startled and searching for an enemy—so dark, suspicious, and threatening was the glance. Such was Herod the Great—a body broken by diseases, a conscience seared with crimes, a mind magnificently capable, a soul fit for brotherhood with the Cæsars; now seven-and-sixty



THE MADONNA OF THE OLIVE-BRANCH

(After the painting by N. Barabino)

years old, but guarding his throne with a jealousy never so vigilant, a power never so despotic, and a cruelty never so inexorable.

There was a general movement on the part of the assemblage—a bending forward in salaam by the more aged, a rising-up by the more courtierly, followed by low genuflections, hands upon the beard or breast.

His observations taken, Herod moved on until at the tripod opposite the venerable Hillel, who met his cold glance with an inclination of the head, and a slight lifting of the hands.

"The answer!" said the king, with imperious simplicity, addressing Hillel, and planting his staff before him with both hands. "The answer!"

The eyes of the patriarch glowed mildly, and, raising his head, and looking the inquisitor full in the face, he answered, his associates giving him closest attention:

"With thee, O king, be the peace of God, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!"

His manner was that of invocation; changing it, he resumed:

"Thou hast demanded of us where the Christ should be born."

The king bowed, though the evil eyes remained fixed upon the sage's face.

"That is the question."

"Then, O king, speaking for myself, and all my brethren here, not one dissenting, I say, in Bethlehem of Judea."

Hillel glanced at the parchment on the tri-

pod; and, pointing with his tremulous finger, continued, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet, 'And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, art not the least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel.'"

Herod's face was troubled, and his eyes fell upon the parchment while he thought. Those beholding him scarcely breathed; they spoke not, nor did he. At length he turned about and left the chamber.

"Brethren," said Hillel, "we are dismissed."

The company then arose, and in groups departed.

"Simeon," said Hillel again.

A man, quite fifty years old, but in the hearty prime of life, answered and came to him.

"Take up the sacred parchment, my son; roll it tenderly."

The order was obeyed.

"Now lend me thy arm; I will to the litter."

The strong man stooped; with his withered hands the old man took the offered support, and, rising, moved feebly to the door.

So departed the famous Rector, and Simeon, his son, who was to be his successor in wisdom, learning, and office.

. . . . . .

Yet later in the evening the wise men were lying in a lewen of the khan awake. The stones which served them as pillows raised their heads so they could look out of the open arch into the depths of the sky; and as they

watched the twinkling of the stars, they thought of the next manifestation. How would it come? What would it be? They were in Jerusalem at last; they had asked at the gate for Him they sought; they had borne witness of his birth; it remained only to find him; and as to that, they placed all trust in the Spirit. Men listening for the voice of God, or waiting a sign from Heaven, cannot sleep.

While they were in this condition, a man stepped in under the arch, darkening the lewen

"Awake!" he said to them; "I bring you a message which will not be put off."

They all sat up.

"From whom?" asked the Egyptian.

"Herod the king."

Each one felt his spirit thrill.

"Are you not the steward of the khan?" Balthasar asked next.

"I am."

"What would the king with us?"

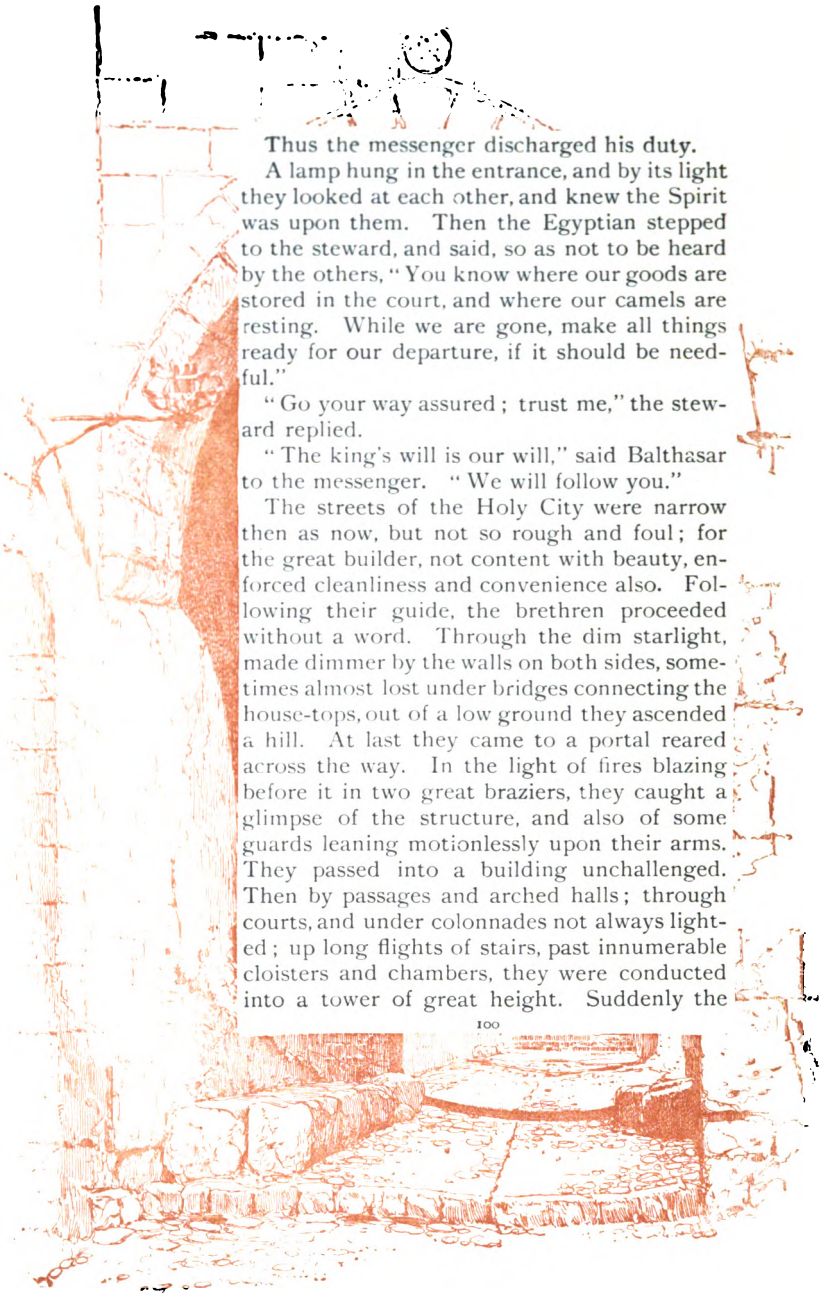
"His messenger is without; let him answer."

"Tell him, then, to abide our coming."

"You were right, O my brother!" said the Greek, when the steward was gone. "The question put to the people on the road, and to the guard at the gate, has given us quick notoriety. I am impatient; let us up quickly."

They arose, put on their sandals, girt their mantles about them, and went out.

"I salute you, and give you peace, and pray your pardon; but my master, the king, has sent me to invite you to the palace, where he would have speech with you privately."



Thus the messenger discharged his duty.

A lamp hung in the entrance, and by its light they looked at each other, and knew the Spirit was upon them. Then the Egyptian stepped to the steward, and said, so as not to be heard by the others, "You know where our goods are stored in the court, and where our camels are resting. While we are gone, make all things ready for our departure, if it should be needful."

"Go your way assured; trust me," the steward replied.

"The king's will is our will," said Balthasar to the messenger. "We will follow you."

The streets of the Holy City were narrow then as now, but not so rough and foul; for the great builder, not content with beauty, enforced cleanliness and convenience also. Following their guide, the brethren proceeded without a word. Through the dim starlight, made dimmer by the walls on both sides, sometimes almost lost under bridges connecting the house-tops, out of a low ground they ascended a hill. At last they came to a portal reared across the way. In the light of fires blazing before it in two great braziers, they caught a glimpse of the structure, and also of some guards leaning motionlessly upon their arms. They passed into a building unchallenged. Then by passages and arched halls; through courts, and under colonnades not always lighted; up long flights of stairs, past innumerable cloisters and chambers, they were conducted into a tower of great height. Suddenly the

guide halted, and, pointing through an open door, said to them,

"Enter. The king is there."

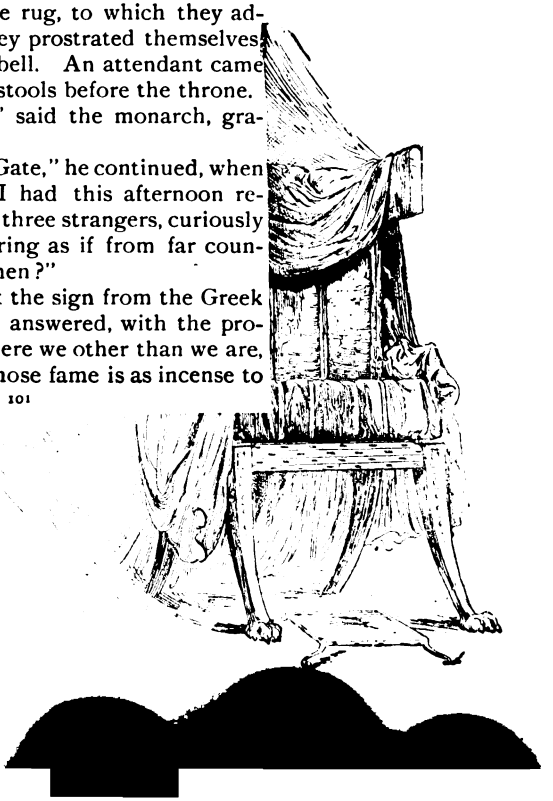
The air of the chamber was heavy with the perfume of sandal-wood, and all the appointments within were effeminately rich. Upon the floor, covering the central space, a tufted rug was spread, and upon that a throne was set. The visitors had but time, however, to catch a confused idea of the place—of carved and gilt ottomans and couches; of fans and jars and musical instruments; of golden candlesticks glittering in their own lights; of walls painted in the style of the voluptuous Grecian school, one look at which had made a Pharisee hide his head with holy horror. Herod, sitting upon the throne to receive them, clad as when at the conference with the doctors and lawyers, claimed all their minds.

At the edge of the rug, to which they advanced uninvited, they prostrated themselves. The king touched a bell. An attendant came in, and placed three stools before the throne.

"Seat yourselves," said the monarch, graciously.

"From the North Gate," he continued, when they were at rest, "I had this afternoon report of the arrival of three strangers, curiously mounted, and appearing as if from far countries. Are you the men?"

The Egyptian took the sign from the Greek and the Hindoo, and answered, with the profoundest salaam, "Were we other than we are, the mighty Herod, whose fame is as incense to



the whole world, would not have sent for us. We may not doubt that we are the strangers."

Herod acknowledged the speech with a wave of the hand.

"Who are you? Whence do you come?" he asked, adding significantly, "Let each speak for himself."

In turn they gave him account, referring simply to the cities and lands of their birth, and the routes by which they came to Jerusalem. Somewhat disappointed, Herod plied them more directly.

"What was the question you put to the officer at the gate?"

"We asked him, 'Where is he that is born King of the Jews?'"

"I see now why the people were so curious. You excite me no less. Is there another King of the Jews?"

The Egyptian did not blanch.

"There is one newly born."

An expression of pain knit the dark face of the monarch, as if his mind were swept by a harrowing recollection.

"Not to me, not to me!" he exclaimed.

Possibly the accusing images of his murdered children flitted before him; recovering from the emotion, whatever it was, he asked, steadily, "Where is the new king?"

"That, O king, is what we would ask."

"You bring me a wonder—a riddle surpassing any of Solomon's," the inquisitor said next. "As you see, I am in the time of life when curiosity is as ungovernable as it was in child-

hood, when to trifle with it is cruelty. Tell me further, and I will honor you as kings honor each other. Give me all you know about the newly-born, and I will join you in the search for him, and when we have found him, I will do what you wish; I will bring him to Jerusalem, and train him in kingcraft; I will use my grace with Cæsar for his promotion and glory. Jealousy shall not come between us, so I swear. But tell me first how, so widely separated by seas and deserts, you all came to hear of him."

"I will tell you truly, O king."

"Speak on," said Herod.

Balthasar raised himself erect, and said, solemnly,

"There is an Almighty God."

Herod was visibly startled.

"He bade us come hither, promising that we should find the Redeemer of the World; that we should see and worship him, and bear witness that he was come; and, as a sign, we were each given to see a star. His Spirit stayed with us. O king, his Spirit is with us now!"

An overpowering feeling seized the three. The Greek with difficulty restrained an outcry. Herod's gaze darted quickly from one to the other; he was more suspicious and dissatisfied than before.

"You are mocking me," he said. "If not, tell me more. What is to follow the coming of the new king?"

"The salvation of men."

"From what?"

"Their wickedness."

"How?"

"By the divine agencies—Faith, Love, and Good Works."

"Then"—Herod paused, and from his look no man could have said with what feeling he continued—"you are the heralds of the Christ. Is that all?"

Balthasar bowed low.

"We are your servants, O king."

The monarch touched a bell, and the attendant appeared.

"Bring the gifts," the master said.

The attendant went out, but in a little while returned, and, kneeling before the guests, gave to each one an outer robe or mantle of scarlet and blue, and a girdle of gold. They acknowledged the honors with Eastern prostrations.

"A word further," said Herod, when the ceremony was ended. "To the officer of the gate, and but now to me, you spoke of seeing a star in the east."

"Yes," said Balthasar, "his star, the star of the newly born."

"What time did it appear?"

"When we were bidden come hither."

Herod arose, signifying the audience was over. Stepping from the throne towards them, he said, with all graciousness,

"If, as I believe, O illustrious men, you are indeed the heralds of the Christ just born, know that I have this night consulted those wisest in things Jewish, and they say with one voice he should be born in Bethlehem of Ju-

dea. I say to you, go thither; go and search diligently for the young child; and when you have found him bring me word again, that I may come and worship him. To your going there shall be no let or hinderance. Peace be with you!"

And, folding his robe about him, he left the chamber.

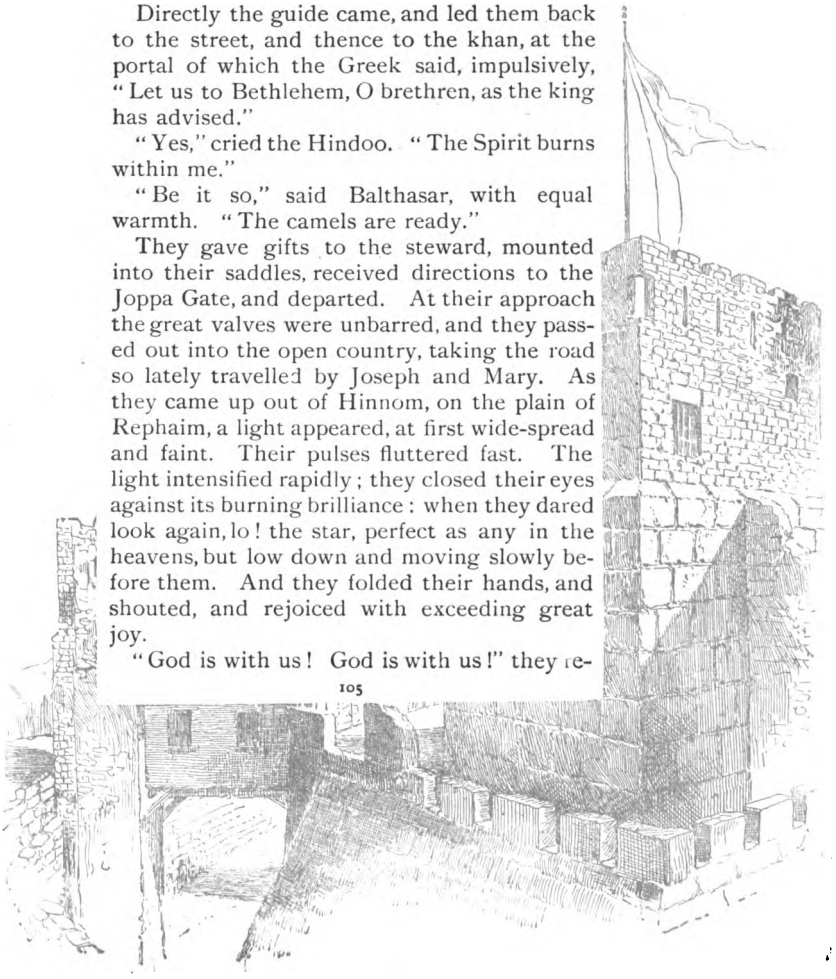
Directly the guide came, and led them back to the street, and thence to the khan, at the portal of which the Greek said, impulsively, "Let us to Bethlehem, O brethren, as the king has advised."

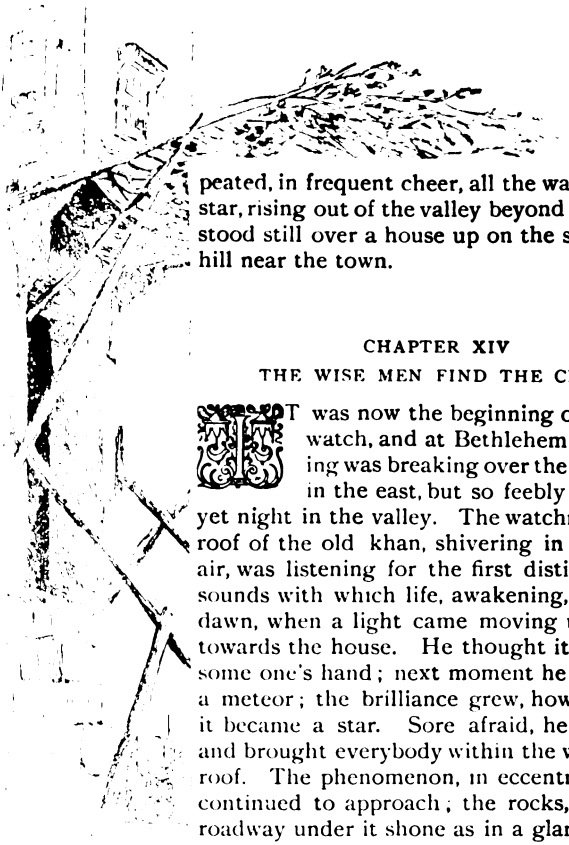
"Yes," cried the Hindoo. "The Spirit burns within me."

"Be it so," said Balthasar, with equal warmth. "The camels are ready."

They gave gifts to the steward, mounted into their saddles, received directions to the Joppa Gate, and departed. At their approach the great valves were unbarred, and they passed out into the open country, taking the road so lately travelled by Joseph and Mary. As they came up out of Hinnom, on the plain of Rephaim, a light appeared, at first wide-spread and faint. Their pulses fluttered fast. The light intensified rapidly; they closed their eyes against its burning brilliance: when they dared look again, lo! the star, perfect as any in the heavens, but low down and moving slowly before them. And they folded their hands, and shouted, and rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

"God is with us! God is with us!" they re-



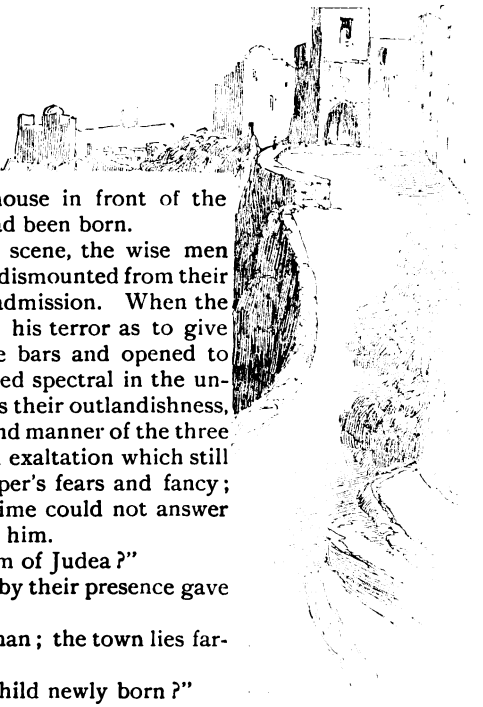


peated, in frequent cheer, all the way, until the star, rising out of the valley beyond Mar Elias, stood still over a house up on the slope of the hill near the town.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WISE MEN FIND THE CHILD

IT was now the beginning of the third watch, and at Bethlehem the morning was breaking over the mountains in the east, but so feebly that it was yet night in the valley. The watchman on the roof of the old khan, shivering in the chilly air, was listening for the first distinguishable sounds with which life, awakening, greets the dawn, when a light came moving up the hill towards the house. He thought it a torch in some one's hand; next moment he thought it a meteor; the brilliance grew, however, until it became a star. Sore afraid, he cried out, and brought everybody within the walls to the roof. The phenomenon, in eccentric motion, continued to approach; the rocks, trees, and roadway under it shone as in a glare of lightning; directly its brightness became blinding. The more timid of the beholders fell upon their knees, and prayed, with their faces hidden; the boldest, covering their eyes, crouched, and now and then snatched glances fearfully. Afterwhile the khan and everything thereabout lay under the intolerable radiance. Such as dared look beheld the star standing



still directly over the house in front of the cave where the Child had been born.

In the height of this scene, the wise men came up, and at the gate dismounted from their camels, and shouted for admission. When the steward so far mastered his terror as to give them heed, he drew the bars and opened to them. The camels looked spectral in the unnatural light, and, besides their outlandishness, there were in the faces and manner of the three visitors an eagerness and exaltation which still further excited the keeper's fears and fancy; he fell back, and for a time could not answer the question they put to him.

"Is not this Bethlehem of Judea?"

But others came, and by their presence gave him assurance.

"No, this is but the khan; the town lies farther on."

"Is there not here a child newly born?"

The by-standers turned to each other marvelling, though some of them answered, "Yes, yes."

"Show us to him!" said the Greek, impatiently.

"Show us to him!" cried Balthasar, breaking through his gravity; "for we have seen his star, even that which ye behold over the house, and are come to worship him."

The Hindoo clasped his hands, exclaiming, "God indeed lives! Make haste, make haste! The Saviour is found. Blessed, blessed are we above men!"

The people from the roof came down and

followed the strangers as they were taken through the court and out into the enclosure; at sight of the star yet above the cave, though less candescent than before, some turned back afraid; the greater part went on. As the strangers neared the house, the orb arose; when they were at the door, it was high up overhead vanishing; when they entered, it went out lost to sight. And to the witnesses of what then took place came a conviction that there was a divine relation between the star and the strangers, which extended also to at least some of the occupants of the cave. When the door was opened, they crowded in.

The apartment was lighted by a lantern enough to enable the strangers to find the mother, and the child awake in her lap.

"Is the child thine?" asked Balthasar of Mary.

And she who had kept all the things in the least affecting the little one, and pondered them in her heart, held it up in the light, saying,

"He is my son!"

And they fell down and worshipped him.

They saw the child was as other children: about its head was neither nimbus nor material crown; its lips opened not in speech; if it heard their expressions of joy, their invocations, their prayers, it made no sign whatever, but, baby-like, looked longer at the flame in the lantern than at them.

In a little while they arose, and, returning to the camels, brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and laid them before the child.

abating nothing of their worshipful speeches; of which no part is given, for the thoughtful know that the pure worship of the pure heart was then what it is now, and has always been, an inspired song.

And this was the Saviour they had come so far to find!

Yet they worshipped without a doubt.

Why?

Their faith rested upon the signs sent them by him whom we have since come to know as the Father; and they were of the kind to whom his promises were so all-sufficient that they asked nothing about his ways. Few there were who had seen the signs and heard the promises — the Mother and Joseph, the shepherds, and the Three — yet they all believed alike; that is to say, in this period of the plan of salvation, God was all and the Child nothing. But look forward, O reader! A time will come when the signs will all proceed from the Son. Happy they who then believe in him!

Let us wait that period.